









CONQUEST



# CONQUEST

*The Story of a Theatre Family*

By

FRANCES FLEETWOOD

IN COLLABORATION WITH BETTY CONQUEST

*With a preface by*

A. E. WILSON

Dramatic Critic, *The Star*



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TO  
THE GLAD AND GALLANT MEMORY  
OF  
“THE GUV’NOR”  
AND THE SPIRIT OF COMRADESHIP  
THAT HE PERSONIFIED



## *Contents*

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	PAGE ix
AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT	xi
PREFACE, by A. E. Wilson	xiii

### PART I. THE GARRICK

I The Young Adventurer	3
II The Lupino Legend	14
III "Billy Barlow" takes a Wife	20
IV Gay go up . . . Gay go down	31
V "Waterloo" at the Garrick	43

### PART II. THE GRECIAN

VI "Bravo Rouse" and the Grecian	59
VII "Conquest of the Eagle"	71
VIII The Nijinsky of Pantomime	80
IX The Middle Years	97
X Evening at the Grecian	107
XI "Grim Goblin"	119
XII General Booth gets "The Bird"	123

### PART III. THE SURREY

XIII Over Blackfriars Bridge	135
XIV "For Ever"	145
XV Surrey Pantomime	156
XVI End of an Epoch	165
XVII Farewell to the Surrey	171

## CONTENTS

### PART IV. BRANCHES OF THE TREE

	PAGE
XVIII The Third Generation	179
XIX The Dillons	187
XX The Dysons and the Broomheads	208
XXI The Farrells and the Listers	212
XXII The Conquest Tradition	235

### APPENDICES

I The Conquest Family Tree	241
II Conquest Pantomimes	243
III Plays at the Grecian (1851 onwards)	245
IV Plays at the Surrey (1881 onwards)	261

BIBLIOGRAPHY	269
--------------	-----

INDEX	271
-------	-----

## *List of Illustrations*

George Conquest surrounded by his Pantomime Creations ( <i>Mander &amp; Mitchenson Collection</i> )	<i>Frontispiece</i> -
Clarissa Bennett in 1819	<i>Facing p. 16</i>
Conquest as Billy Barlow ( <i>Finsbury Public Library</i> )	17
Clara Conquest, aged 16, as Irene	<i>Page 42</i>
Benjamin Conquest in 1838 ( <i>Finsbury Public Library</i> )	<i>Facing p. 64</i>
Grecian Concert as seen by Dickens ( <i>ca.</i> 1834) ( <i>Finsbury Public Library</i> )	65
Mrs. Conquest in old age ( <i>Mrs. Joseph</i> )	65
Julia Harland and Amilie Conquest in <i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i> ( <i>Mander &amp; Mitchenson Collection</i> )	80
Nix, the Demon Head ( <i>Mander &amp; Mitchenson Collection</i> )	81
Cartoon: George Conquest in 1876 ( <i>Mander &amp; Mitchenson Collection</i> )	<i>Page 96</i>
Conquest and his Son in <i>Puss in Boots</i> ( <i>Shoreditch Public Library</i> )	<i>Facing p. 112</i>
Scenes from <i>Spitz-Spitz, the Spider Crab</i> ( <i>Shoreditch Public Library</i> )	113
Conquest and Pettitt as Dramatists ( <i>Shoreditch Public Library</i> )	128

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Scenes from <i>Grim Goblin</i> ( <i>Enthoven Collection</i> )	<i>Facing p. 129</i>
Laura Dyson as Principal Girl ( <i>Enthoven Collection</i> )	<i>Page 170</i>
Betty Conquest and "Daphne". Inset : Arthur Conquest ( <i>Mrs. Joseph</i> )	<i>Facing p. 192</i>
Charles Dillon as Othello ( <i>Mme Makino</i> )	193
Cissy Farrell	208
George Conquest in Middle Age ( <i>Mander &amp; Mitchenson Collection</i> )	208
The Three Napoleons, Bonaparte, Gomersal and Lister ( <i>Enthoven Collection and Mander &amp; Mitchenson Collection</i> )	209
Francis Lister as Ferdinand and as Macduff ( <i>Mander &amp; Mitchenson Collection and John Vickers</i> )	224
Francis Lister ( <i>John Vickers and Houston Rogers</i> )	225
Grecian Theatre in the time of Rouse ( <i>Bishopsgate Institute</i> )	<i>End papers</i>

## *Author's Acknowledgment*

IF anyone takes a cynical view of human nature, let him try the experiment of saying: "I am writing a book—will you help me?" He will be astonished at the ready response, and at the trouble that comparative or even total strangers will take on his behalf.

So many people have contributed to the present book that it is difficult to thank them all. I would like to make special mention of my collaborator, Betty Conquest (Mrs. Joseph), and her mother, Mrs. Arthur Conquest, whose store of anecdote and family knowledge was invaluable; of Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, without whose technical assistance and friendly interest this book would very probably never have seen the light; and of George Nash and his staff at the Enthoven Collection, who were never too busy to help in unravelling a knotty point. Most valuable, too, were the personal reminiscences of the late Miss Ida Millais and the book she lent me about the Standard Theatre. Nor must I forget the long-suffering librarians at Colindale, Stepney, Finsbury, Shore-ditch, Lambeth and Highgate, whose most inaccessible files of newspaper cuttings and prints were unearthed for my benefit. A word of thanks, too, to Mr. A. E. Wilson, who lent me—on no previous acquaintance—an irreplaceable copy of one of the Surrey pantomime books; and to Madame Marie Makino—also a complete stranger—who sent me the portrait of Charles Dillon which is reproduced here.



## Preface

It is with the greatest pleasure that I comply with the author's request that I should write a foreword to *Conquest*. Good wine needs no bush and that is particularly true of Miss Fleetwood's book, for it is full of an excellence that commends itself to all who are interested in the history of the theatre. I hope those who read these delightful pages will derive as much pleasure from them as I have done.

I have a particular affection for bygone theatres, and regret the passing of so many which have been associated with the Victorian drama. I revel in the romance that clings about them and in reading about the struggles and achievements of those who have trodden their boards. With Hardcastle I can truly say: "I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine," adding, for my own part, "and old theatres." And of all the old theatres that appeal to my interest the vanished Surrey and the Grecian are particularly dear. In their association with Christmas pantomime as it used to be—a subject of which I have made something of a study—their very names have a magic ring, conjuring up visions of vanished delights.

My interest in the Grecian was aroused very early in life because it was of that theatre of which my father so often spoke when I was a child. During his boyhood in the 'seventies he had frequently seen its pantomimes and though he had memories of the *Britannia* at Hoxton, of the *Pavilion*, Whitechapel, and the *Standard*, *Shoreditch*, as well as of *Drury Lane*, it was of the Grecian productions that he spoke most highly. In his opinion there was never anything to equal them and he would grow eloquent about the excitement of the "chase" scenes and the weird impersonations in which George Conquest took such active part.

When as a youthful journalist I returned to London from my seaside home I made a special pilgrimage to the City Road just for the vague pleasure that came from seeing the hallowed spot on which the Grecian once stood. It was the same with the Surrey, though I was fortunate enough to see that historic house in the *Blackfriars Road* still in existence and I am glad to think that I

## PREFACE

was once within its walls during its last phase when, for an all too brief spell in the 1920's, it became a home for opera. The Conquests had long departed, but the name meant much to me and I could not dissociate them from the thrill as I sat in the circle of that vast and still handsome theatre.

About this remarkable family Miss Fleetwood has made a complete and fascinating study. I have myself written a good deal about them in connection with pantomime, but whereas I skimmed only the surface, Miss Fleetwood, with painstaking thoroughness, has delved into mines that have yielded far richer treasures of discovery and story.

It is flattering for me to learn that it was my pantomime books that first aroused her interest in the Conquest family, though such feeling is tinged with envy and jealousy. Now why hadn't I thought of writing such a book? Such regrets, however, are useless. Miss Fleetwood's patient research and her vivid style in evoking the past have produced a book which I am sure I could never have equalled.

A. E. WILSON

*Look always on the Surrey side  
For true dramatic art—  
The road is long, the river wide,  
But frequent buses start  
From Charing Cross and Gracechurch Street,  
(An inexpensive ride,)  
So, if you want an evening's treat,  
O seek the Surrey side.*

*I gape in Covent Garden's walls,  
I doze in Drury Lane,  
I strive in the Lyceum's stalls  
To keep awake—in vain.  
There's nought in the dramatic way  
That I can quite abide,  
Except the pieces that they play  
Upon the Surrey side.*

“OVER THE WATER”  
(From H. S. LEIGH's “Carols of Cockayne.”)



PART I

THE GARRICK



## CHAPTER I

### *The Young Adventurer*

QUESTIONED about his ancestry young Benjamin Oliver might have retorted with Marshal Junot: "*Ma foi, je n'en sais rien! Moi je suis mon ancêtre!*" Or in the still more practical spirit of Abraham Lincoln: "I don't know who my grandfather was. I am much more concerned to know what his grandson will be."

Heralds' College records one Benjamin Oliver, a fuller, who became Mayor of Exeter and was knighted by King Charles II. This, however, is probably pure coincidence, as the Devon Olivers died out in the third generation.

It has been generally assumed that the Olivers were of Jewish stock, but this is doubtful. The surname, which might at first suggest it, has two derivations—from the old English "Knollys" and from the Portuguese "Oliveira": only the latter is Jewish. George Conquest in conversation with his son denied the suggestion; and he can have had no prejudice in the matter, since his own wife was partly Jewish and the Hebrew element was strongly represented among his friends and colleagues at the Grecian Theatre. Certainly the family were not Jews by religion, for they were all christened, married and buried with Church rites.

Benjamin came midway down a large family born to George Augustus Oliver, a tailor and draper, and his wife Sarah. In later years he said, and no doubt believed, that he was born in Cornhill. It seems more likely, however, that at the time of his birth his parents were living at No. 6, Duke Street (now Little Britain), Smithfield, in the parish of St. Bartholomew-the-Great. Three of their children were baptised in that lovely Norman church: Samuel Swinson (1798), Sarah (1799), and Joseph Middleton (1801). St. Michael's, Cornhill, has the names of two others—Penelope (May 1805) and Charles (1807); while an entry in the burial register—William Oliver (18 days old), June 1808—probably refers to the same family. The youngest child, Mary, was born at Holloway and registered at St. Mary's, Islington, in 1809.

Biographers give Benjamin's birth-date as 1805, but this is a

virtual impossibility. (Had he been Penelope's twin, they would surely have been christened together.) At his death in July 1872 he was sixty-eight; it seems therefore that he was born in the first half of 1804. In the 1861 census, when he gives his age as fifty-seven, he enters his birthplace as "City of London," but we have scanned some twenty-five City registers without finding the entry.

In any case, his first conscious sight of the world must have been the tall, smoke-blackened tower of St. Michael's, seen from the window above his father's shop at No. 76, Cornhill, where the District Bank building now stands.

No doubt, like other proud fathers, George Oliver indulged in pipe-dreams as he bent over his baby's cradle. Henry, the eldest son, would inherit the business, and Benjamin would be his assistant. Yet somehow the mercurial child, with his black eyes and roguish smile, had not the look of a future tradesman. Perhaps he would become an artist: instead of cutting broadcloth and unrolling bales of calico and kerseymere, he would design outfits for the exquisites of Holland House—maybe even for the great Beau Brummell himself. . . . But not in his rosiest dreams could George have foreseen that this son of his would die a rich man, owner of a theatre and founder of a family which for over a century would be famous in stage circles under its chosen name of CONQUEST.

The London on which Benjamin opened his eyes was a fast-growing city of under a million inhabitants. Picture it as a large blot of ink made with a spluttering pen—the main blob representing a solid block of building from Whitechapel westwards to Hyde Park and from Marylebone south to the Thames; the surrounding splashes being villages and clusters of villa residences in process of absorption. City magnates who owned a curricule or gig drove back and forth daily to their homes in the charming resorts of Hampstead and Highgate in the north, Dulwich, Camberwell and Brixton in the south. The "cit"—as the humbler city-dweller termed himself—spent his summer afternoons at Islington or fishing under the willows and poplars of Sadler's Wells. Midway in this scale of prosperity, George Oliver owned a country house at Holloway, where he spent occasional holidays.

As yet the Thames was crossed only by three bridges—London Bridge, Blackfriars and Westminster; but the Oliver children watched the building of the Strand Bridge, started in 1811 and renamed Waterloo after the great victory four years later. They

must have remembered well the great Frost Fair in 1814, when the Thames was frozen over between Blackfriars and London Bridge. On the ice were tents and booths, swings, bookstalls and places for dancing. Large fires were lit, while those who still felt chilly could warm themselves further with "gin and gingerbread" aboard the frozen-in boats.

They had no father to share in the fun, for George Oliver lay buried in the vault of St. Michael's. He was only forty-four when he died on November 13, 1810—to be remembered (according to his obituary in *The Times*) as "a most affectionate father, a tender husband, a sincere friend, and much respected by all who knew him."

His explicit and business-like will suggests that his heritage to his descendants was not only money, but also that organising capacity in which they excelled. To his wife he bequeathed an annuity of £200 and his house at Holloway, for her use during her lifetime. At her death it was to be auctioned and the proceeds added to his residual estate, which was to be divided equally among his sons and daughters as they came of age (or, in the case of the girls, upon marriage if this preceded their majority). Sarah further inherited his life-insurance of £1,000, with the recommendation that she should use it to carry on the business, helped by her son Henry. When he made this provision, George Oliver no doubt expected to live until his son was a man. As it turned out, Sarah relinquished the shop—for the entry concerning it has been deleted from the 1811 directory, and the auction of a Cornhill draper's goods, noted in a December issue of the *Morning Advertiser*, probably refers to this stock.

Allowing for the greater value of money a hundred and fifty years ago, we see that the Olivers were comparatively well-to-do, though Sarah, left single-handed to bring up eight children, of whom the youngest was only a year old, must have worked hard in order to keep up their standards.

Looking back, it is hard to visualise all the changes in the century-and-a-quarter spanned by the lives of Benjamin, born in the days of wooden battleships, and his daughter Amilie, who lived to see the Atlantic flown. The child Benjamin saw a city lit murkily by oil lamps, except in Pall Mall, where the flaring new gas-globes were one of the sights of the town. A policeman to him was not a Bobby but a Charley—an old man with a lantern, drowsing in a

sentry-box and liable to be overturned by young bloods out on the spree. Of our everyday comforts Benjamin had no conception: he had never put a match to a gas-jet—let alone flicked an electric switch—never filled a bath from the hot tap, never heard the word “train” except as applied to a lady’s dress. To the end of his life, incidentally, he refused to travel by train, regarding this new-fangled transport as noisy, dangerous and undignified.

Entertainment of a rough-and-ready kind was not lacking. Benjamin, like any Elizabethan lad, could have squirmed his way through the jostling crowds to see a bull-baiting or bear-baiting, a dog-fight or cock-fight; he could have watched a public hanging at Newgate, seen malefactors in the stocks at the foot of Haymarket or exposed to mockery in the tall pillory at Charing Cross. And to wash away the memory of such scenes, he could have swum in the Peerless Pool, near the Shepherd and Shepherdess tea-gardens.

This pool—originally called the “Parlous” or Perilous Pond, because several youths had been drowned in it—was embanked and surrounded with trees in 1743 by a man named Kemp, who made it into a swimming-pool measuring 60 by 30 yards, built marble steps and vestibule, and even provided a library of light literature for the bathers. Near by was an artificial canal stocked with carp, tench and other fish, for the benefit of Cockney anglers.

At the Shepherd and Shepherdess itself, site of the future Grecian Theatre, he may have feasted on frumenty, cakes and cream. Or, rambling still farther afield, down the Haymarket where white-smocked countrymen still brought their fragrant waggons of hay, across Westminster Bridge and along the New Cut, with its small houses interspersed with fields and gardens and sparkling streams, he may have seen the gilded Pegasus flashing on the roof of the Royal Circus, which was to become the famous Surrey Theatre of his son George.

The theatre of Benjamin’s adolescence was a dreary twilight, illumined by the setting star of Mrs. Siddons and the rising star of Edmund Kean. In the two patent houses, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, garbled Shakespeare alternated with sententious tragedy and treacly comedy. The biting wit of Congreve and Vanbrugh was a thing of the past. Sheridan was still alive, but his elegant mockery of the “man of sentiment” had missed its mark. Younger dramatists exaggerated the sentiment and forgot the satire. The Court, with a mad King and a Regent whose pleasures were more

of the flesh than of the brain, could not give that intellectual stimulus that had radiated from the brilliant Elizabeth and the witty, French-trained Charles; while the growing volume of middle-class patronage which later produced drawing-room comedy and domestic drama had not yet made itself felt.

The nadir was probably reached around 1824, at which time a newspaper remarked, as an example of public taste:

“*Venice Preserved* will scarcely draw a decent house, while such pieces of unmeaning absurdity as *The Cataract of the Ganges* will fill Drury Lane to overflowing every night for three weeks past. The scenery and decorations, field of battle, burning forest, and cataract of real water, afforded a succession of splendours I had no conception of; but I was heartily tired of the eternal galloping, burning, marching and counter-marching, and the dull speechifying in which it abounds. A lady on horseback riding up a cataract is rather a bold stroke, but these things are quite the rage now.”

And the *London Magazine* in October 1821, complaining of the lurid titles given to plays, cited *The Jew, the Gamester, the Seducer, the Murderer and the Thief*—described as “a domestic drama”!

A few years later a certain Mr. Winston, in his examination before the Dramatic Committee, characterised Operas, Pantomimes, Horsemanship, Elephants—all as “the legitimate drama, with the exception of ‘Lions.’”

Characteristic of the early nineteenth century was the *Burletta*. It may be traced back to the Licensing Act of 1737, which restricted straight plays to Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Samuel Foote had contrived to procure a seasonal licence for the Haymarket; but the minor theatres might only present plays which were not in the repertory of the two main houses, and which contained at least five pieces of vocal music in each act. The burletta seems to have developed in three stages: first as pure spectacle—like a *ballet d'action*—with necessary explanations written on banners carried by the actors; secondly as musical pieces with recitative dialogue—often dramatised ballads, declaimed to their original tunes; and finally as plays in rhymed verse with interspersed songs.

In this last form the burletta merged with melodrama—an importation from the Continent. This accounts for the propensity of characters to burst into song at moments of crisis, which has been so gaily caricatured in recent revivals of Victorian melodramas. The restrictions explain, too, if they do not excuse, the

editing of Shakespeare's plays by managers who sought to legalise them by interpolating songs and ballets.

Charles Dibdin, writing in 1826, lists eight minor theatres: the Royal Amphitheatre (Astley's) near Westminster Bridge; the Surrey Theatre, or Royal Circus, in St. George's Fields; the Royal Cobourg, Surrey side of Waterloo Bridge; Sadler's Wells, Islington; the East London or Royalty Theatre near Wellclose Square; the West London Theatre in Tottenham Street; the Adelphi Theatre in the Strand, and the Olympic Theatre in Wych Street.

The two latter were opened under a licence from the Lord Chamberlain during the six winter months; and the six former under licences granted by the magistrates of their respective counties, in force all the year round, of which privilege some availed themselves. All of them opened on Easter Monday, for the summer season, until October or November, but some reopened at Christmas and continued until Passion Week. Entertainments began at six-thirty or seven o'clock and ended about eleven. Their prices were uniform: boxes 4s., pit 2s., gallery 1s.—except the Cobourg, which had an additional tier of boxes at 3s.

The *Theatrical Inquisitor* hails this innovation with the somewhat undemocratic remark: "Of this classification of the company we highly approve. If such a plan were general, it would tend to uphold the reputation of the minor theatres, and thus prove a general benefit to the drama."

Designed by the Frenchman Cabanel, the Cobourg has survived to the present day and has earned lasting fame under its more familiar title the Royal Victoria—fondly called the Old Vic.

Its opening on Whit Monday 1818 is a date of special interest to the Conquest family, for it gives the first recorded glimpse of Clarissa Ann Bennett, who, as "Mrs. Conquest, of the Grecian," was to share Benjamin's life for so many years and contribute so greatly to his success.

Clarissa, born in 1803 or 1804, was the eldest daughter of Joshua Bennett, a coal merchant of Wandsworth, and his wife, whose name appears (from the 1841 census) to have been Sarah.<sup>1</sup> Family

<sup>1</sup> We cannot be certain, as this census specifies no relationships. The "Sarah Bennett, aged 60" who is listed there may have been a Miss Bennett, keeping house for her widowed brother.

tradition says that she was of French stock, and this is highly probable, as a large Huguenot colony had settled in Wandsworth. Certain it is that she transmitted to her daughter not only a talent for ballet-dancing (at that time far more developed on the Continent than in England) but also a profound love of France. Far more French than English, too, was Clarissa's expressive little face, with its wide mouth, retroussé nose and frame of curly dark hair.

The Bennetts were long-standing residents of Wandsworth, where Joshua was born in 1778. His father, Thomas Bennett, was a Quaker, and evidently a man of strong principles, for in 1788, with several of his co-religionists, he was summoned for non-payment of tithes. (The manner in which the case is reported indicates that it was a matter of conscientious objection, not of mere carelessness or impecuniosity.)

Most unfortunately, the printed register of Wandsworth parish stops in 1789, and the original registers have been almost obliterated by air-raid damage. An exact check of the Bennett family has therefore been impossible; but from the census records and Joshua's will it appears that he had seven daughters: Clarissa, Elizabeth, Ann, Fanny, Sarah, Charlotte and Harriet, and a son, Solomon, who became a lighterman.

Wandsworth at the beginning of the nineteenth century was a charming village with about 1,100 inhabitants, strung out along the banks of the Wandle, between the East Hill and the West Hill, whence green fields stretched unbroken to Putney and the banks of the Thames. Clarissa's childhood was passed in a house at Frogmore, close to the wharf at the confluence of the Wandle and the Thames, where her father's coal-barges were moored. A neighbourhood that must have been full of delights to adventurous children, who had only a few steps to run before they reached the little river, foaming bravely over a weir between cottage gardens on the one side and the redolent timberyard of a sawmill on the other.

It seems odd that the daughters of a Quaker family should have made the stage their career. Had Clarissa been the only one to do it, one might have imagined that she acted in defiance of her father—and indeed, the fact that both she and her inseparable younger sister, Ann, are excluded from Joshua's will suggests a major family row. But Elizabeth, Ann, and Sarah each in turn became a dancer, though they soon gave up their career—the first and last-named for marriage and Ann to become her sister's housekeeper.

Perhaps their teacher, Pierre Le Clercq, had a connection among the Wandsworth Huguenots, and, recognising their talent, overcame parental opposition in order to launch them on the stage.

The opening of the Cobourg was an event. Its sumptuous decorations were described at length: there were three tiers of boxes, the two lower ones fawn-colour with crimson octagonal compartments enclosing white bas-reliefs, the upper boxes and gallery front adorned with a "tolerably chaste imitation of a Grecian sculptured frieze." (Does this refer to artistic merit or to a discreet use of fig-leaves?) From the ceiling hung a fine chandelier, with ground-glass lamps bringing out the prismatic colours of the pendant crystals. In the centre of the front boxes, an allegorical figure of Fame supported the Cobourg arms, inscribed: "*Their Royal and Serene Highnesses, the Prince Leopold and Princess Charlotte of Saxe-Cobourg, Patrons, 1816*"—poignant indeed, since the beloved young Princess was already dead. It is one of History's little ironies that Victoria, who succeeded to the throne which would have been filled in turn by Charlotte and her son had they survived, should also have supplanted her in the name of the theatre to which her generosity originally gave birth.

A main feature of the building was the Marine Saloon, with gilded ornaments of nautical inspiration. Eight Corinthian columns supported the ceiling, and in between were murals—Shakespeare's Cliff at Dover, the harbours of Naples and Genoa; at the west end one huge painting—with a grandiloquent patriotism deriving from the spacious days of Baroque—showed the triumph of Nelson and Amphitrite, with Lord Exmouth's victorious fleet dominating the harbour of Algiers in the background.

The first-night programme consisted of three pieces: a highly topical play, *Trial by Battle*, dramatising a murder case heard about a fortnight previously, in which the suspect, taking advantage of an obsolete but unrepealed law, offered to prove his innocence by challenging the brother of the dead girl to a duel; an Oriental Ballet, *Alzora and Nerine*; and a pantomime founded on *Comus*.

The ballet, designed and danced by the famous Le Clercq and his wife, embodied the well-worn but always attractive theme of the peasant girl whose kindness to a fairy disguised as an old crone is rewarded with a talisman entitling her to three wishes and to the fairy's help at need. Returning to the village, Nerine (danced by Mrs. Le Clercq) tells her friends of her good fortune and "three

beautiful young creatures" dressed as peasant girls dance a *pas de trois* in celebration. These girls, pupils of Le Clercq, were the Misses M. Nichols, C. Bennet (*sic*) and Brock. The *Sunday Monitor* reviewer, who saw the dress-rehearsal, gives them a pat on the back: "Mr. Le Clercq's pupils do him every credit."

After the first night, however, all the allotted space was taken up by a public dispute between Mr. Glossop, one of the theatre proprietors, and his stage manager, Mr. Norman, who was also the pantomime clown. As was not uncommon then, this man was engaged by two theatres at once (a pernicious custom which was one of the causes leading to Grimaldi's breakdown). On the nights when he was due at Covent Garden, the programme was to start with the pantomime, so that he might leave in time for his second engagement. Arriving at the theatre on the Monday morning, however, he found the programme in its original order, and the clown's part transferred to Richard Usher. Norman took this in a fighting spirit worthy of his name. At an hour's notice he had a broadsheet printed, detailing his grievance, and circulated among the audience. Just before the curtain went up, he appeared before it and appealed to the house. He got his backing and the pantomime was shifted forward.

The chaos behind the scenes can be imagined: stage-hands striking and resetting scenery; performers whipping off their costumes in a hurry; the enraged proprietor and aggressive stage-manager snapping at each other. . . . All very upsetting for an inexperienced girl of fifteen.

It is an interesting sidelight on the theatre of the period that the *Sunday Monitor* critic, though qualifying the incident as "unseemly," does not find it unprecedented—he merely seems mildly pained that it should have disturbed a distinguished first-night audience. The *Theatrical Inquisitor* takes a stiffer line, its reviewer remarking unkindly that he cannot see why Mr. Norman wanted to play the clown, since he showed no gifts for it! Looking at a coloured print of Norman with Grimaldi, both on pony-back, one can well believe this: his melancholy hatchet-features, like a harassed Duke of Wellington, do not suggest drollery—unless he was that rarity, a dolorous comedian.

In any case, the final round went to Norman's rival, for, two months later, when for a bet he ascended the Thames from Southwark Bridge to Cumberland Gardens in a wash-tub drawn by four geese, we find him described as "Usher, *the Clown of the Cobourg Theatre*."

A week later *Sunday Monitor* came again, and this time nothing distracted him from the performance. Clarissa certainly impressed him:

"The exertions of Mr. Le Clercq are highly laudable," he wrote, 'and he bids fair, with his charming little pupils, to rival even the ballets at the Opera House. The Dennetts of this theatre (for such we call the Misses Nichols, Bennet and Brock) have wonderfully improved since the first night we were there. Their confidence in the audience has increased, and with it their easiness and grace. Their extreme youth, the liveliness of their countenances, lighted up with smiles, and the gaiety with which they partake in the frolic of the scene, contribute greatly to the charm of their performance. One of them we have marked as possessing peculiar and commanding grace and dignity. This we believe (taking the order in which their names stand on the bill for that in which they present themselves on the stage) is Miss Bennett."

It would be pleasant to think that Benjamin visited the Cobourg and lost his heart to little Miss Bennett, but it is unlikely. Pocket-money cannot have been lavish in that fatherless household; nor is it probable that, with footpads on the prowl, a boy would have been allowed to return alone at night along the path leading to Waterloo Bridge, which *The Times* suggests should be "better fenced against the accidents of persons in the dark falling into the marshes." Still, who knows? Perhaps Benjamin was a stage-struck lad who ran errands for his gallery shilling and coaxed brother Henry to take him along. It would have been an apt initiation—for it was to the Cobourg, only eleven years later, that he was to bring Clarissa as his bride.

Meanwhile, it was time for the boy to earn his living, so his mother sent him to join an elder brother who was a coach-maker at Worcester.

Benjamin did not take kindly to a country life or to the strict discipline imposed by his brother. He was determined to get back to London. Week by week he saved a few pence from his scanty wages, and at last, one bright spring morning, he tied his possessions into a bundle, slipped out of the house, and turned his back on Worcester.

<sup>1</sup> A great compliment, as this trio of dancing sisters was famous. In 1820 the *London Magazine* invites its readers to "snatch a grace beyond the reach of art from the Miss Dennetts at the Adelphi," where they "weave the airy, the harmonious, liquid dance."

Nowadays, of course, his brother would have telephoned to the police and Benjamin, regarded as "a young person in need of care and protection," would have been rounded up in a car and returned to him within a few hours. But the lads of Wellington's day had more scope for free enterprise. It never occurred to Benjamin that he was in need of care or protection. The sun shone, the hedges were fresh and green, and the people of the roads were friendly. He whistled as he walked, and at night, quite literally, he sang for his supper.

From a drawing of Benjamin as a young man, we can easily picture him in his 'teens: a compact little figure, wiry and sturdy, with great roguish black eyes and a smile like the Lincoln Imp. It was perhaps those eyes and that friendly, mischievous smile, rather than his musical talents, which earned him a welcome in the inns where he sang each evening; but by the time he reached the outskirts of London he had gained something more than his keep—a confidence rare in so young a lad. He had proved that he could turn his talents into money and that he could plan and carry through an enterprise by himself. The city lay open for his conquest. . . .

Conquest! A brave motto for an ambitious man.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Lupino Legend*

FOR years past it has been stated in print by a reliable authority that Benjamin Oliver's wife, the foundress of the Conquest family, was Marianne Grimaldi, *née* Lupino.

What a vista that magic name conjures up! The long history of the family has been traced by their historian, Barry Lupino, and recorded by his brother Stanley in that fascinating book *From the Stocks to the Stars*. Back through Thomas Frederick Lupino, who only missed his century by four years; Bologna the Italian—Harlequin to Grimaldi's Clown; Violante, the tightrope dancer who launched Peg Woffington on her stage career; back to the first Luppino, poor and in exile, tramping the roads from Plymouth with his baby son slung behind him, in the reign of James I. Back and back, through the Italian puppet-masters and the Latin pantomimes, to the She-Wolf of Rome. . . . Hundreds of years of disciplined bodies and supple minds; the blended blood of three nations; the gay unquenchable spirit of the "rogues and vagabonds" who have travelled the roads and trodden the boards, poised on the tightrope and the slack rope, throughout the length and breadth of England. What a heritage for an actor! Is there any biographer who would not snatch with both hands at an alliance with the Royal Family of Grease-Paint? But, alas, as one clutches, the image of Marianne breaks up, dissolves, slips Undine-like into the waters of the past.

Who lies buried beside Benjamin in Kensal Green Cemetery, with no hint that she is a second wife?—Clarissa Ann Oliver Conquest.

Whose name stands in St. Mary Whitechapel register as the mother of his sons—Benjamin, born in 1831, and George, born in 1837?—Clarissa's.

Who is the mother of Clara Conquest, the "odd girl out" of the family?—Clarissa . . . as is proved beyond question by her will.

Marianne . . . Marianne Lupino—where do you come into the story?

Amid all the uncertainties two facts emerge: firstly, if Benjamin and Marianne lived as man and wife, it must have been before and not after her union with Grimaldi, for when Joe died Benjamin had been married at least three years to Clarissa Bennett; secondly, no recorded descendant of Benjamin Oliver can claim Lupino blood. If Marianne did bear him a son, the child probably died young. Benjamin's will, with its careful provision for his son and his daughters, his newly married second wife and the child he expected from her, shows a strong sense of parental responsibility; any other son would surely have been mentioned, if not as such, at least by his surname—but there is no equivocal legatee.

This is perhaps the place to utter a warning: the documented history of the Conquests begins with Benjamin's acquisition of the Garrick Theatre in 1830. Before that date, our information comes from stories handed down in the Conquest and Lupino families; from playbills, trade directories, census returns, and parish registers. One can merely spread out the jigsaw and arrange it in some kind of pattern; but only too often the key-piece is missing. To avoid continual repetition of that irritating word "perhaps," we will tell a positive story—putting once and for all the saving clause, *to the best of our knowledge*.

Having failed to make Benjamin a coach-builder, Sarah Oliver found him a new trade. Her second son Samuel had set up as a boot-maker in Bishopsgate Without, and he was willing to employ his brothers. The docile Charles (who many years later became Business Manager at the Grecian Theatre) worked so well that in a few years' time he was able to set up his own business in Tottenham Court Road; but once again Benjamin was a problem. He was far more interested in the tunes that he persisted in singing than in the leather that suffered under his restless fingers, as he waited for the evening to set him free. With the lighting of the oil-lamps he could slip away and hang around stage-doors or take a cheap ticket at a minor theatre. Three of these were within an easy walk—the Royalty in Wellclose Square, the Cobourg, and the Surrey just over the river. At one of these he may well have met Marianne and confided his ambitions to her.

The Lupino girl, with centuries of theatre in her blood, was five years older than Benjamin. Short and boyish as he was, with his large dark eyes, he had everything to rouse a woman's maternal instincts; and Marianne's inborn knowledge of the world into

which he longed to break must have made her a useful helpmate and adviser. How long their idyll lasted or whether that handsome young reprobate Joe Grimaldi brought it to an end, we cannot say; but if Marianne deserted Benjamin for Joe, she must often have regretted her choice.

The only son of Britain's most popular clown had promised to become a brilliant performer. In 1824 *The Times* said of him: "Young Grimaldi is *the* best Clown, excepting his father." But during a spirited brawl he was hit on the head by a police truncheon, the resultant concussion left him subject to epileptic fits, which were attributed to it the deterioration of his character. From that time onwards he was in constant trouble and worked very hard, though he could still give a fine performance. At the time of his death he had just come to the Queen's Theatre in Tottenham Street.

So many wild tales have been circulated about young Joe's life that it may be worth while giving the facts. We have heard that he committed suicide, was killed in a public-house brawl, died in misery and insane; while many people have identified him as the Dying Clown in Dickens' graphic tale.

No doubt in order to spare the feelings of his invalid father, only a very brief notice was published in *The Times* and other responsible papers, but a few evening newspapers told the full story.

The inquest was held on December 17, 1832, before the Coroner Thomas Stirling, at the Hope public house, Tottenham Street. Evidence was given by Grimaldi's landlady, Mrs. Walker, that on returning from the theatre he had been seized with violent vomiting, which continued through the night. Mrs. Walker and her husband looked after him, but as he did not improve they advised his father, who sent his own doctors. Towards the end, the patient was delirious and had to be held down in bed. He kept repeating snatches of his parts, wanting to dress and go to work.

Describing Grimaldi's last days at the theatre, Mr. Burton, the house manager, said that Joe had asked him to give a fashionable young lady a pass into one of the boxes. Later, greatly agitated, he asked to transfer into a private box where they would be unobserved. He sat with his friend until it was time to dress for his part of Scaramouche in *Don Juan*.

Catherine Elliott, the stage manager's wife, said that she was rehearsing on the evening of Grimaldi's last performance. He said to her: "Old woman, I was nicely in for it last night." She replied she supposed so, thinking he meant that he had been drinking.



Clarissa Bennett in 1819



Conquest as Billy Barlow

He then said: "It was a great row, but I was not aware it could be heard on the stage." He drew from under his sleeve part of a lady's bedgown and said "that unless a dickey, it was all the linen he had on." Complaining of a pain in his side, he asked her to feel it, but could not bear the pressure of her hand. He did not say how it happened.

William Elliott, the stage manager, said Grimaldi had slipped down a ladder on going through the trap in the stage. He did not complain that he had been injured by the fall. Witness saw the body, and there were distinct marks of bruising on the side, knee and ankle. Surgeon Langley (who had previously given medical evidence) was recalled and stated that the bruises were not the cause of death.

From all this it appears that young Joe was by no means desperate, destitute, suicidal or insane. He was in the normally "broke" condition of any actor who has just got poorly paid work after resting—as indicated by cheap lodgings and improvised under-wear. (His "cram" about this ceases to be a *non sequitur* if his visitor had been demanding money and he were excusing himself to his own conscience, and to a possible eavesdropper, for having none to give her.) But he was quite cheerful about it, was on friendly terms with his colleagues, and obviously—until the final stage of his illness—in full possession of his faculties. From the symptoms described—sharp pain in the side, vomiting and weakness, leading delirium and collapse, he probably died from what would now be called peritonitis, brought to a head by the blow received in

the fall. For the elegant young lady, with whom he quarrelled so bitterly in the depths of his private box, it is tempting to imagine that we have here a last glimpse of Marianne. One would rather picture her thus than as the haggard, slatternly wife described in Dickens' tale. In any case, she had certainly parted from Joe before his death or it would not have been left to the landlady to nurse him.

In an interview published in *Actors by Daylight* (December 1838) Benjamin has given his own account of his theatre début:

"... a Miss Courtenay (since celebrated as the mother of a young agitator) was about to take a benefit at the old English Opera House. *Macbeth* was the play, and our hero was introduced

to her as one of the Witches. Now the said lady, having an uncommon sharp eye to business, began by praising the looks of young Ben. His eye, she said, was the finest she had ever seen. The bait was swallowed, and the brilliancy of his vision cost him four pounds for tickets (he has kept a sharp look-out ever since!). Our hero played, and the criticisms of the day said that the Witches were the only persons that knew anything about it: they were received with great applause, and his destiny was sealed."

It would be interesting to find those contemporary criticisms, put an exact date to Benjamin's first performance, and ascertain what surname he used; but so far they have not come to light. There is, however, a note in Oxberry's *Dramatic Biographies*, apparently in the last week of May, 1826, that a Miss Courtenay had taken a benefit at the English Opera House (as the Lyceum was then called). The programme consisted of *Fazio*—in which Miss Courtenay sang Bianca—*The Rendezvous*, a comic interlude, and *The Irishman in London*. No mention here of *Macbeth*. Possibly Miss Courtenay, either encouraged by the results of the first benefit or, more probably, disappointed in them (for Oxberry tells us that it rained sufficiently heavily to keep all but the most enthusiastic at home), tried her luck again a few months later. The *Macbeth* in question was probably a musical version, with the filmic title *The Fatal Prophecy or The Scottish Regicide*, that had been staged in this same year at the Cobourg. (In which, incidentally, Miss Bennett had played one of the Witches.)

The term *Benefit* had three distinct meanings:

- (a) The end-of-season bonus granted to members of a stock company as a prearranged addition to their salary. The more important performers, naturally, had first pick of the night on which an agreed proportion of the takings after deducting expenses was their perquisite. This led to considerable ill-will, particularly among the actresses, who quarrelled about precedence and jockeyed for nights when high receipts might be expected, leaving the slack nights for the rank-and-file.
- (b) A charity performance in aid of some incapacitated artiste or hard-up dependants of a dead actor.
- (c) A "shop window" effort by some amateur or semi-professional, who would hire an unoccupied theatre for one evening, hoping to fill it by selling tickets among friends.

Benjamin's purchase of tickets suggests that Miss Courtenay's benefit was of the last-named kind, especially as her name is not

## THE LUPINO LEGEND

among those of the regular English Opera House company, either in 1825 or 1826.

It should be remembered that on coming of age in 1825 Benjamin had received his portion of the money left by his father. This accounts for his ability to spend so freely, and also for the comparative independence which enabled him to turn his back on shoemaking and strike out into the hazardous theatre world.

## CHAPTER III

### *" Billy Barlow " takes a Wife*

FROM playbills in the Enthoven collection we learn something about the early career of Clarissa Bennett and her sisters. Unfortunately they list performers simply as "Mr." or "Miss," giving initials only to distinguish two players with the same surname. At times the Bennett girls were together at the Cobourg, enabling us to pick out three sisters: "C." (Clarissa), who joined the theatre when it opened in May 1818 and remained there certainly until the summer of 1821, and possibly until she transferred to the Royalty in 1822; "E." (Elizabeth), who came to the Cobourg in September 1819 and disappears from its bills in July 1821 (she and her younger sister Fanny later married brothers named Blackmore and settled down in Wandsworth); and "A." (Ann), who is only mentioned once by her initial (in April 1821). A fourth sister, "S." (Sarah), is billed as a solo dancer at the Regency in 1823, and turns up again much later at the Garrick. She became Mrs. Young, was soon widowed, and went back to stay with her father.

After the success of Le Clercq's pupils in *Alzora and Nerine* the same trio danced for nearly six weeks as Reapers in *Harlequin's Honeymoon*. Clarissa also appeared in a Rural Ballet inserted into *The Dog of Montargis*. Next April, with Misses Brock and Loy, she was one of the Three Graces in *The Nymph of Mount Helicon*. Later she graduated to playing named parts, such as Ellen in *A Regular Irish Row*, and Tuckey—the Captain's boy—in the pantomime *Obi, or Three-Fingered Jack*. On September 27, 1819, the two Bennetts and Miss Brock appeared as Spanish Slaves in *Noureddin and the Tartar Robbers, or the Rose of Balsora*.

At this point a number of fresh characters crowd into the story: Farrell, Gomersal, Sloman, Harry Beverley and his wife. John Farrell, who had come from the Theatre Royal, York, to the Regency when the Beverleys took it over in December 1814, and since then had been at the Royalty in Wellclose Square, came to the Cobourg as Lennox in *Tam o'Shanter*, with the two elder Bennetts as Witches. Here he rejoined Harry Beverley, who had

## "BILLY BARLOW" TAKES A WIFE

been at the Cobourg intermittently since March 1820. Eventually they all migrated to the Royalty.

Henry Roxby Beverley—known as "Beauty" because he was the ugliest actor of his day—was a son of William Roxby, owner from 1814 to 1828 of the multinomial Tottenham Street theatre.<sup>1</sup> This actor called himself Beverley after the Yorkshire town and two of his sons followed suit, the other two remaining plain Roxby.

The link between the Beverleys and the Bennetts is one of the missing jigsaw pieces, but it cannot be coincidence that, over a period of five or six years, wherever Mrs. Beverley went Miss Bennett followed her like Mary's little lamb.

A Miss Bennett was singing at the Regency during the summer of 1816, when Louisa White, the future Mrs. Beverley, was Columbine. If this was Clarissa, she was only thirteen, but she is not specifically billed as a child performer. Louisa was older, for she married in May 1817, but possibly they were fellow-pupils at Le Clercq's dancing-class. From their marked likeness in physique and talents they may have been related. Both were tiny, curly-haired brunettes, so slight that even after marriage and motherhood they looked like teen-age girls; both were not only soubrette actresses and dancers of Columbine status, but also choreographers and ballet-mistresses. Then, too, Mrs. Beverley's daughter was called Clara—an unusual name, but one that kept recurring in Clarissa's family.

Gomersal and Sloman, both of whom were later associated with Benjamin Conquest at the Garrick Theatre, were at the Cobourg, on and off, between 1819 and 1822, when they too went to the Royalty.

There was plenty of fun to be had in the varied programmes. One wonders how Clarissa enjoyed herself in *The British Captain and the Indian Chief*, when as Orangitooah she danced an Indian *pas seul*, in the somewhat alarming company of a real bear and a sagacious dog! Louisa Beverley's speciality was the hornpipe, of her own composition, which "at the urgent request of several of the first families" she danced in *Mary of Deptford, or Tars Ashore*. Early in 1823 the same dance was introduced into the ballet *Peter the Emperor and Paul the Sailor*.

More solid fare was provided in August 1824, when they staged *Macbeth*, with Mr. Beverley<sup>2</sup> in the name-part, Farrell as Macduff, and Miss Bennett as Donalbain.

<sup>1</sup> Called successively the Regency, Theatre of Variety, West London, Queen's, Fitzroy and Prince of Wales's (unofficially, "the Dusthole").

<sup>2</sup> Probably Henry's father. He himself, as a low comedian, would not have been given such parts as Macbeth and (later) Virginius.

On August 9, 1824, the Royalty had a moment of glory, when it presented Edmund Kean as Hamlet, with Farrell as his Horatio. But the history of the theatre was drawing to its close. At 1 a.m. on April 12, 1826, it was burned down, supposedly through fireworks used to represent an eruption of Mount Etna. No lives were lost, as at that hour the building was empty, but the money loss was between £12,000 and £20,000, of which only about £1,500 was insured. Farrell, who in 1825 had become its manager, was one of the chief sufferers. Among other things he lost his wardrobe—a serious blow in those days, when an actor had to provide his own costumes.

The paths that were to bring Benjamin and Clarissa together were converging. Realising that the destruction of the Royalty had left the district without any place of amusement, Farrell seized the opportunity to build a theatre of his own. One of his colleagues at the Royalty had been a comedian named Wyatt, whose father—a “knacker” or catsmeat man—was willing to advance the two young men money to buy and adapt a cloth-factory at No. 85, Whitechapel Road. On February 26, 1827, this building was opened as The Pavilion.

How did Benjamin Conquest come there? His own story implies that Farrell had been talent-spotting at Miss Courtenay’s benefit, and had engaged him on the strength of his performance as the Witch. His début was as Buskin in the farce *Killing No Murder*, of which the date has been lost. The first extant playbill bearing his name is that of Easter Monday, April 16, 1827, when the theatre reopened after Lent with the added attractions of “a spacious centre Chandelier illuminated with splendid gaslight,” and a new drop-scene of the Royal Pavilion at Brighton “embracing the Marine Parade, Steyne, etc.” The main play was *The Advance Guard, or The Night before Battle*, in which “Mr. Conquest” played Fuzil, a Soldier of the French Army, and “Mrs. H. Beverley, of the Royalty,” danced a Spanish Bolero.

No more is heard of the Pavilion until January 13, 1828, when William Williams, John Farrell and William Wyatt were indicted for keeping a disorderly house. (This was the usual procedure when any common informer tried to close a minor theatre.) The case, as usual when a sympathetic magistrate was in charge, was dismissed, but it evidently gave Farrell ideas: only two years later he tried the same trick against his rivals at the Garrick.

## "BILLY BARLOW" TAKES A WIFE

Soon after the destruction of the Royalty, plans were set afoot to rebuild on its site. In September 1827 a dinner was given by the proprietors to celebrate the laying of the foundation stone of a new theatre, called the Brunswick, and in five months it was complete.

It was an ambitious structure. The architect, Mr. Stedman Whitwell, had been inspired by the façade of San Carlos Opera-House at Naples. Twelve pillars were flanked on either side by groups representing the Genius of Dramatic Literature and that of Dramatic Painting. Along the whole front ran a balcony, giving a good view of the bronze-work between the pilasters, and the theatrical masks that adorned their capitals. An anonymous poet, experimenting in the metre of "Don Juan," described it as follows:

*... The building was of those  
Which, simply grand, afford a chaste delight;  
Before its front twelve stately pillars rose,  
Of solid structure and majestic height,  
Which on a base of marble did repose,  
And just above the pillars, less in sight,  
In large old Roman characters the date  
Stood simply—Eighteen hundred and twenty-eight.*

(Is he trying to be funny, we wonder—or did the last line just happen?)

Among the admiring passers-by, one or two scanned the frontage with a professional glance and remarked that the walls were too flimsy to support the heavy lead roof, but no one paid any attention to them.

The theatre opened with a flourish on February 25, 1828. Its programme comprised an adaptation of Scott's novel "The Bride of Lammermoor," called *The Mermaid's Well, or the Fatal Prophecy*, and a ballet *The Happy Return* (of a Sailor thought to be lost at sea).

Among the company are the following names:

Mr. Wyman, from the Theatre Royal, Derby.

Mr. Conquest, from the Coburg.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. H. Beverley, from the Italian Opera.

Miss Bennet [*sic*].

<sup>1</sup> The spelling "Cobourg" was used when the theatre was first opened, but later on it was more often written "Coburg"; for consistency, we have retained the former spelling throughout.

## THE GARRICK

That Conquest came "from the Cobourg" is surprising, because his name on its playbill of October 19, 1829, is annotated "*his first appearance at this theatre.*" In mid-January, 1828, however, the Cobourg had staged a play called *Life of a Soldier*, with a large male cast including four unnamed Midshipmen. Possibly Benjamin was one of these, and on returning a year later with an enhanced reputation did not care to remind the audience of his walk-on.

On February 28th, at eleven o'clock, the Brunswick company had been called for a rehearsal of *Guy Mannering*. About a hundred and seventy people were in the building—actors, orchestra, staff, and workmen finishing the structure. (So hastily had the theatre been built that the mortar was damp and the decorations were still incomplete.)

Several actors, finding themselves not needed, were hanging around the green-room, the passages and the stage door, chatting. The rest were on stage, where the stage-manager, Mr. Farren, in one of the boxes, was handing out parts. Mr. Fearon, the conductor, was in the orchestra pit with his two sisters and his wife, professionally called Mrs. Glossop.

The proprietor, Mr. Maurice, came over to Farren and handed him a farce called *The Poachers*. He said: "I wish, Farren, that this could be done on Monday, for it is a piece which I think likely to do us a great deal of good." Mr. Farren agreed, adding that he was sure the interests of the concern would prosper. "Yes," replied Maurice—and these were the last words he was heard to utter, "I think so too, and I hope God will help us."

At that moment a loud crack drew attention to the heavy chandelier over the stage, which was rocking to and fro. Two actors—Goldsmith and Wyman—who were at the side of the stage, threw themselves back into a box, opposite Farren. Maurice incautiously moved towards the source of the noise and was under the chandelier when it crashed down, killing him instantly. Then the roof fell in.

The scene must have resembled a direct hit in an air raid, and it brought out the same qualities of courage and resource. Farren was protected from the falling masonry, but he remained blocked in his box. Then he saw a girl of twelve—daughter of Mrs. Yates, one of the performers—crawling towards him through the rubble. She was bleeding from the head and crying to him to save her. He dragged her in, and after a while, when the immediate danger was over, managed to extricate himself, carrying the child on his

## “BILLY BARLOW” TAKES A WIFE

back. All the while, he said afterwards, she was calm and helpful, making herself as light as possible and doing what he told her.

Others who had narrow escapes were Arthur Dillon and his wife. Dillon (whose stepson Charles later became a well-known tragedian and married Clara Conquest) had been talking to an actor named Gilbert, who was killed in the disaster. Here is his story as related at the inquest:

“Scarcely had poor Gilbert left me when I heard a crash and someone called: ‘Run, or you’re a dead man!’ I hurried down, calling out ‘Eliza!’ to my wife, but she was running downstairs after four or five workmen. I leaped, but the wall must have fallen with me, for I was up to the waist in mortar and rubble, expecting the wall to topple upon me at any moment. Some Irish labourers swore I should not be left to perish—they came and dragged me clear.”

He escaped with no other harm than the loss of his boots. Mrs. Dillon, having taken refuge in a water-closet under the stairs, remained there for several minutes, until one of the workmen found a plank, put it up to a small window and climbed out, pulling her up after him. She too was unhurt.

The first casualty list was as follows:

Mrs. Henry Beverley, Miss Fearon (actresses).

Mr. Maurice (proprietor).

Mr. Carter, Mr. Gilbert (actors).

6 unknown persons.

Later, a meeting of survivors was held at the Black Horse Tavern in Well Street, where it was found that Mrs. Beverley was safe. The body mistaken for hers was that of a fourteen-year-old girl. Benjamin Conquest was also uninjured. He did not give evidence, so there is no record of his experiences. Probably he was one of those who had drifted out after glancing at the call-sheet.

Was this the occasion of Benjamin’s first meeting with Clarissa? It is tempting to imagine that she came round to the ruined theatre to find out what had happened to her sister and her friend—or even that the young man volunteered to visit her, carrying news of their safety.

For it seems improbable that the “Miss Bennet” of the Brunswick was Clarissa. All that we know of her life in the few years preceding her appearance as Mrs. Conquest at the Cobourg in

October 1829, is that her daughter Clarissa Ann (known as Clara) was born in Whitechapel in 1824 or 1825. At Clara's death in July 1888 her age was given as sixty-three, which would make her birth-date 1825; but in the June 1841 census she is entered as seventeen, making her a year older. The confusion of the three Misses Bennett at the Cobourg renders it impossible to check Clarissa's movements accurately from the playbills; but it seems that she was at the Royalty in November 1822, at the Cobourg in 1823, back at the Royalty in February and in June 1824, continuing there till the end of November. A "Madame Clara" who danced a *pas de trois* in *Der Freischütz* at the Regency for several weeks in the autumn of 1824 may also have been Clarissa, in view of Henry Beverley's joint connection with that theatre and with the Royalty—for Clarissa was dancing in the same play at the latter theatre.

The four-month gap between February and June 1824 may represent time taken off for the birth of Clara; or it may have been after November 1824.

From October 1825 to January 1828 we find a Miss Bennett at the Cobourg; but (like the "Miss Bennet" of the Brunswick) she is billed in the smallest type and is obviously a mere chorine—Elfin Sprite, Female Slave, Peasant Girl, Attendant Nymph, etc. Now Clarissa, before leaving the Cobourg in 1822 and after her return in 1829, was given small parts, solo dances, and reasonably good billing. The other Miss Bennett was therefore probably her less talented sister Ann.

Family tradition says that Clarissa, when Benjamin first met her, was a young widow called Mrs. Conquest, and that he, liking the brave ring of the name and regarding it as a good augury, adopted it as his own. This is hard to reconcile with the fact that he was already calling himself Conquest in 1827, at the outset of his stage life. For a young man of twenty-three, earning a bare 12s. a week as second low comedian to Wyatt at the Pavilion, to burden himself with a wife and step-child would have been incredibly rash. So far the puzzle seems insoluble.

The name Conquest, incidentally, is connected with Wandsworth, where in 1607 a certain Sir Richard Conquest married a local lady named Sara Snow. Is it possible that a monument to this worthy could have put the name into the mind of Clarissa or Benjamin? For a tantalising factor in the situation is the inclusion in the 1841 census of Sarah Oliver, a widow aged sixty-five, resident in Martin's Court, Wandsworth. Was this in fact Benjamin's

mother? And if so, when and why did she go to live there? Was it after 1829, on her daughter-in-law's recommendation, or did she let the house at Holloway and migrate soon after her husband's death? In this case her younger daughters, Penelope and Mary, may well have been class-mates of the Bennett girls at Miss Dell's School for Young Ladies in the High Street, and Benjamin and Clarissa may have played together as children.

Tempting as this theory is, it hardly seems probable, for the Oliver boys all worked in the City of London, and Benjamin's own account of his return from Worcester implies that he headed thither. A city-born lad in 1820 would not have envisaged Wandsworth as “dear old London town.”

In April 1828 Farrell obtained a licence for the Pavilion, upon condition that he employed the performers thrown out of work by the Brunswick disaster, and that he paid a pension to Mr. Maurice's widow out of the takings. His company included Conquest, the Dillons, Mrs. Beverley and her little daughter Clara, and Miss Bennett.

The programme for June 11th notes “A Comic Song, by Mr. Conquest.” One week later the title is given: “Comic Song, *Billy Barlow*, by Mr. Conquest.” This song was Benjamin's first triumph. The sensation was equal to that of the popular nigger melody *Jim Crow*. Benjamin sang it three or four times a night for twenty-eight weeks, first at the Pavilion and then at the Olympic, until it seemed that he would be nicknamed “Billy Barlow” for the rest of his life.

Why was the song so popular? Reading it nowadays one feels that it must have owed more to the singer's personality than to the jejune text. And yet. . . . Billy Barlow is the typical “Little Man” so beloved of British audiences—the Chaplinesque figure whose well-meaning efforts always go wrong. We are dragged through his history from birth onwards:

(O! when I was born said old Mother Goose,  
“He's a very fine boy, but he'll be of no use.” . . .)

In various misadventures he is dubbed a dunce, a guy, a “chummy” (presumably, from his pained protest, equivalent to the modern “chump”); his comrades put sand in his tea and give him soap for cheese. Some final verses dealing with his adult adventures are starred, with a footnote: “Verses marked \* written

by Mr. Conquest." These at least have a rakish humour about them:

*I one day fell in love with a beauty, good lack,  
A very fine woman, but she was a black;  
And when we gets married I'll let you all know,  
And in nine months from now bring a young Billy Barlow.  
Oh! dear, lackaday, O!  
And in nine months from now bring a young Billy Barlow.*

The final verse, also starred, must have brought the curtain down amid a riot of laughter:

*Oh dear! oh dear, I'm sick of my life,  
I wish I was married and got a good wife;  
I should like that smart damsel upon the fourth row,  
If she'll wed and become Mrs. Billy Barlow,  
Oh! dear, lackaday O!  
If she'll wed and become Mrs. Billy Barlow.*

No doubt, like a Hungarian fiddler playing his compliment in a restaurant, Benjamin addressed this stanza directly to the prettiest girl within eyeshot of the stage, varying the number of the row as required—with keen competition among the local lovelies to be thus distinguished.

To show the alteration in standards of taste in thirty years, we quote the last verse as sung by Sam Cowell in 1856:

*I've finished my song and I bid you adieu,  
Mrs. Barlow is waiting, so n'bat can I do?  
I'm sorry to leave you, but I really must go,  
You shall soon hear again from Billy Barlow;  
O! dear, raggedy, oh!  
You shall soon hear again from Billy Barlow.*

which might well take any prize offered for the worst exit line on record.

The Pavilion closed down in the first week of November 1828, in preparation for its Christmas pantomime, and on November 10th the names of Conquest, Gomersal and Mrs. Beverley are listed in the new Olympic company.

The Olympic in Wych Street, off the Strand, was one of the nineteen theatres built by Astley in the course of his career. Sala describes it as "a queer, low-browed little building with a rough wooden portico before it, with little blinking windows like the

portholes of a man-o'-war.” It had, in fact, a nautical origin, having been built out of the timbers of a dismantled seventy-four gun ship captured from the French.

Benjamin Conquest's first appearance on this stage was on November 24th, as “Tassel, Servant to Melford” in a burletta entitled *La Morgue, or The Little French Doctor*.

From this point for nearly a year the playbills give us no guidance as to the movements of Mr. Conquest, Mrs. Beverley or the Misses Bennett. The gap suggests that this is where we should place those “wanderings and ponderings” at Tenterden and Hastings, which in later years Benjamin mentioned as his only experience of provincial theatre life.<sup>1</sup>

Some of these “ponderings” must have been matrimonial, for on October 19, 1829, we find him at the Cobourg in a joint engagement with Mrs. Conquest—still, incidentally, singing his song.

So well known did Mrs. Conquest's dancing-school become in later days, that people assume she was solely a dancer and ballet-mistress; but her early billing shows her as a useful small-part actress. She usually played burletta and farce, occasionally melodrama. Here are some specimens of her work between 1829 and 1830, when she was about twenty-seven:

On the first day she danced as *pas seul* in *Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte*; next week, in the burletta *Bears, not Beasts*, she was Fatima (“who can't bear her Husband to make a beast of himself”). In *The Exile of St. Helena* (“Napoleon” Gomersal, of course) she played a character named Rose, and the same evening danced a *pas seul* in *The Wraith of the Lake*. A burletta, *The Jew of Canada*, reunited Gomersal as Hazleton, Sloman as Abraham, Conquest as Brisk, and his wife as Widow Trudge. In an oriental spectacle, *The Lion Chief of Cabul*, Mr. Conquest was Caleb Balderdash, and Mrs. Conquest, Deborah; in *Rochester*, the couple were, respectively, Amen Squeak, a Parish Clerk, and Bell, the Barmaid at the Inn.

The Cobourg pantomime of 1829, *Harlequin and the Genie of the Enchanted Harp*, had Clarissa as its Columbine, Princess Starlight-eyes. Benjamin played Ki-Ko-Kum, the Royal Herald (“with a lyrical description of the charms of the Princess of China”). The programme also included a skit on the famous Siamese Elephant, called *Siamorindianaboo, Princess of Siam, or The Royal Elephant*.

<sup>1</sup> His name appears, in fact, on a bill of the Old Theatre, Hastings, dated Tuesday, September 29 (1829), in a programme consisting of *The Hero of France Charles XII*, and an “Afterpiece,” *The Rencontre, or Love finds out the Way*, with a duet “When a Little Farm we keep.”

## THE GARRICK

This must have delighted the Conquests, since one of Clarissa's sisters was dancing at the Adelphi with the real elephant—called "Mademoiselle d'Jeck." The animal was a great sensation, filling the Adelphi for over three months. Once Princess Victoria, the future Queen, was allowed back-stage to feed it "with sweetmeats." (We are not told whether an elephantine indigestion followed this diet!) During these weeks one feature was a *pas de trois* danced by the Misses Barnett, Bennett and M'Henry.

Among the characters taken by the Conquests between March and October 1830 were: Placide and Madeleine in *The French Revolution*; Muskito Bluebella and Jeanette in *The Bear Hunters of the Pyraneess* [*sic* on playbill]; and several attractively-named low comedy parts played by Benjamin: Tristram Collywobble in *Guy Fawkes*, Pumpo in *Robert the Devil*, Dicky Chicken in *Mutiny of the Nore*, Jekin Groby in *The Cloth of Gold* (in which his wife was Mrs. Alesop), and Hannibal Remnant, a retired Linen-Draper, in *Richard Turpin, the Highwayman*.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Gay go up . . . Gay go down*

It must have been in November 1830 that Clarissa whispered to Benjamin that her dancing days would soon be interrupted; or more probably, with commonsense inherited from her French mother, she told him roundly that he must settle down and make provision for a family.

Perhaps it was this consideration which made him join with Charles Freer and Francis Wyman in taking a lease of the Garrick Theatre in Leman Street, Whitechapel. Although the street was already provided with a colourful menagerie of public houses—the Golden Lion, Black Horse, White Hart, and Brown Bear—Benjamin added to their number by opening the house next the theatre as the Garrick Tavern. For the next sixteen years this was his home.

The site had long-standing theatrical associations, no less than three theatres having already existed in the open space known as Goodman's Fields, bounded on the east by Leman Street and on the north by Ayliffe Street. In 1728 a man named Odell took over a throwster's shop in Ayliffe Street, collected some strolling players, and began to act without a licence. An attempt by the Lord Mayor to suppress the place failed, but nine years later it was pulled down by Henry Giffard, who built in its stead the handsome Goodman's Fields Theatre.

Here David Garrick made his first anonymous appearance as understudy for the Harlequin Yates, suddenly taken ill. On Giffard's advice he then toured for a while as "Lyddal," returning in his own name to Goodman's Fields in October 1741, when his Richard III took London by storm. It is said that the carriages of fashionable folk going to this East End theatre stretched from Whitechapel to Temple Bar, and that on occasion as many as five Dukes might be counted in the audience. Garrick followed up his success by playing Bayes in *The Rehearsal*, and then King Lear. The season lasted 169 nights before the authorities took fright and closed the theatre down, on the ground that it was infringing the rights of the Patent Houses.

Another house, the New Wells, served the neighbourhood from 1739 to 1752, and, after standing empty for many years, was finally destroyed by fire in 1802..

The theatre which opened on Boxing Day, 1830, under the title "The Garrick," was a converted cotton-factory. Although described as "little," it originally held over 1,350 persons, and at the time of its destruction in 1846 its capacity was two thousand.

A Bill of Sale in the Enthoven collection gives some interesting details of its construction. The building, situated in a large plot of ground, had 8 commodious private boxes, public boxes holding 250 persons, pit and gallery with seats for 700 and 400 respectively. the stage measured 30 feet in depth by 37 in width. Twenty-two iron columns supported the boxes, which were lit by gas and ornamented by five handsome cut-glass chandeliers. On one side of the stage was an extensive painting-room, fifty feet long; on the other, a green-room, wardrobe and five dressing-rooms. The property was held under a 21-year lease, at £70 per annum. Attached to it were saloons, which could be let for more than sufficient to pay the rent.

The three young men—all under thirty—set to work with vigour and ingenuity to solve the problems inherent in theatre management. Capital? They would finance themselves as they went along. A licence? Not easy to obtain, for the war of the "Majors" and "Minors" was entering on an acute phase; and besides, there was immediate opposition to be feared. Farrell was furious that three of his best actors had not only seceded from the Pavilion but were planning a counter-attraction. However, laws are made to be evaded. A simple device—analogueous to the modern Club Theatre, where Sunday shows can be given, provided a "Membership" ticket is issued—was to advertise as "Garrick's *Subscription Theatre*." This meant that tickets were sold at a neighbouring shop, no money being taken at the door.

Meanwhile, they were working hard to get the place ship-shape. In this they certainly succeeded, for the adjective "elegant" is used by several newspapers, while the *Weekly Times* critic—whose enthusiasm has preserved the artist's name for us—launches into panegyric:

"The decorations of the theatre deserve the highest praise; they are at once neat, unostentatious and effective. . . . Every ornament appears to have been selected and placed with the taste and discrimination of a clever artist. The whole has been effected under the direction of Mr. Henry, a gentleman but slightly known to the

public at present, but whose talent must make its way. In concert with his able assistants, he has produced some beautiful scenery; the subjects are marked with boldness, fidelity, and brilliancy of colouring. We think the spirited proprietors of the Garrick would act judiciously in giving Mr. Henry an opportunity of displaying his abilities on the prolific subject of a Panorama."

Can this "Mr. Henry" and his wife (the latter mentioned once or twice in notices of plays) be the Roxby Beverleys, who for some reason had temporarily dropped their surname? The idea is feasible, when we remember that Henry's younger brother William was a scene-painter of considerable renown. A modicum of the same talent may well have been Henry's portion. The presence of Clara Beverley in the company gives added probability to the surmise.

On December 27, 1830, the theatre was opened with a programme consisting of three pieces: an introductory sketch called *Housewarming, or A Few Friends at the Garrick*, in which Conquest, Freer and Wyman appeared as themselves, supported by Shakespeare, Garrick (Mr. Gann, of the Surrey), Thalia, and Melpomene; a comic ballet—the forerunner of those which brought so much fame to the Grecian—*The Phantom Lover, or The Innkeeper's Daughter*; and a melodrama: *Friendship, Love and Liberty, or The Renegade of Portugal*.

There was a cosy family atmosphere about the company, which included two of Clarissa's sisters, little Clara Beverley, and the mysterious "Mr. and Mrs. Henry." From Covent Garden they had two actresses, Mrs. Mangeon and Mrs. J. H. Macnamara, while on the male side there were the three proprietors, with Messrs. Gann and Carlos.

The critics were kind. Evidently the revival of theatrical associations in a spot consecrated to the memory of Garrick was welcome. Even *The Times* sent a representative, who recorded his impressions in a paragraph that contrived to be, at one and the same time, turgid, patronising and obscure. We dimly gather that an actor (from the programme, Carlos) appeared as Shakespeare, to welcome the audience and drink prosperity to the new House. The reporter is heavily facetious about the actor's none too clean hands and the cup of brown stout in which the toast was drunk:

"In the poet's own language: 'That in the Captain's but a choleric word, Which from a soldier were flat blasphemy.' Now had so novel an incident occurred among that interesting people whom John Bunyan, with the courtesy of his craft, has vouchsafed

to call 'The Wild Irish,' we should have otherwise characterized it, but in the more civilized regions of Goodman's Fields we suppose its proper term is a mere practical anachronism. Although the site of this little concern is somewhat better than a Sabbath day's journey from the more frequented precincts of Cogaingne, it will probably provide amusement for many who would not seek it elsewhere, as the prices are low and the hours early, whilst the entertainments combine the attractions of noise, number and variety, so acceptable to visitors more numerous than select."

In brief, *The Times* considered it had been slumming, but had secretly rather enjoyed itself in the process.

The *Weekly Times*, on the other hand, gave unstinted praise to the enterprise:

"Monday, this really elegant theatre was opened, and attended by a fashionable and respectable audience, who appeared most agreeably surprised, not alone with the beauty of the house, but the treat which was afforded them. . . . The theatre itself forms a great ornament to this part of the metropolis, and if it had no greater claim on public patronage and support, the fact of its giving employment to nearly 40 persons whose talents were not required at any of the other theatres, would be sufficient."

Farrell's reaction to the friendly press accorded his rivals was immediate. Next day he took out a summons, requiring the proprietors of the Garrick to show why they had opened the theatre without being duly licensed. Mr. Hardwick, the issuing authority, tried to dissuade him. He pointed out that the Pavilion itself continually infringed the Act by presenting straight plays, not covered by its licence.

The Three Musketeers riposted by an appeal to the public, claiming that the Pavilion had obtained its licence on the pretext of employing the performers thrown out of work by the Brunswick disaster, and that it was Farrell's action in discharging them that had driven them to open the Garrick.

On January 20 the case came up at the Middlesex Sessions. It was conducted in lively style by a Chairman who was frankly in favour of the defendants. The prosecutor, Mr. Alley, observed that they were charged with violating an old Act of Parliament to prevent disorderly houses. He then read, amid laughter, one of the bills stating that the Garrick would be opened on December 27, and the public who wished for amusement were invited to come to the house-warming and put their feet under the fender: "The bill set forth that there would be no money required at the door;

but that, Lord Ellenborough had held, was not enough to shield offenders from the penalties of the Act."

Various witnesses were then called, but not one of them could prove any disorderly proceedings in the house.

"Then I think we can give judgment at once," interposed the Chairman: "I consider this a theatre as much as any in London. The entertainments may be the same, or partly the same, as in other places. Whether they have a licence I know not. If they have offended, it is under another Statute. As the thing has been proved at present, the Court cannot convict."

And so the indictment was quashed, and the Garrick had won its fight for existence. It was a Pyrrhic victory, however, for the costs were a crippling burden on the first season's profits.

Meanwhile, the theatre continued to play to capacity. The opening programme had been succeeded by a melodrama, *Twm John Catty, the Welsh Rob Roy*, alternating with the perennial *Mutiny at the Nore*, in which Benjamin played his favourite part of Dicky Chicken. In the accompanying ballet, *A New Year's Gift*, the dancing of Mrs. Conquest and Clara Beverley—described as "a most talented child"—was highly praised.

At the beginning of March one of the Misses Bennett played Phoebe in *The Miller's Maid*, and was told by a critic who meant to be kind that she obviously lacked experience but "with a little practice may become an acquisition to the establishment."

Lacking an initial, one cannot be positive—but this is probably Clarissa's devoted younger sister Ann Grace, who in later years shared the Conquests' home and is buried in their grave. Clarissa, newly married, with five-year-old Clara to care for, another child on the way, the theatre ballets to organise and the tavern to superintend, must have had her hands full. She needed Ann's help—and no doubt the girl was more of an acquisition to the household than to the stage. The suggestion of "inexperience" is rather odd, since Ann had been dancing at the Cobourg and elsewhere for nearly ten years, but perhaps this was her first venture as a straight actress.

Towards the end of the month "a whole bench of Magistrates" visited the theatre—presumably to see for themselves whether it was a disorderly house—and "expressed themselves highly gratified with the arrangements."

The duel with the Pavilion went on. Farrell, stimulated by rivalry, had redecorated and almost rebuilt his theatre, ready for opening at Easter. Its light peach walls were set with medallions of

Garrick, Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Kean, etc., surrounding a head of Shakespeare. Along the entrance passage were landscapes of Rome, Loch Katrine, the Falls of Tivoli, and Kelso Abbey, besides two dioramas representing Westminster Abbey and a moonlit glade.

It was rumoured that Farrell was in treaty with Kean, Sinclair, and Miss Graddon. The managers of the Garrick countered by securing Elton for a Shakespeare season, during which *Richard III*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* were played in conjunction with melodramas. A deliciously incongruous bill of April 1831 reads:

OTHELLO.

NAPOLÉON'S GODSON; OR THE MULETEER AND HIS MONKEY.

Next month it was announced that Elton had been secured by Elliston to play leads at the Surrey. Evidently the Garrick was a "shop-window" theatre.

Carrying out their guest-star policy, the proprietors concluded their season by engaging three popular performers from the Patent Houses—Mr. Hunt, Mr. Latham, and Miss S. Phillips.

On July 2, Benjamin's eldest child and namesake was born, and a week later the theatre closed down for the summer. The proud father cannot have had much leisure to admire his son, however, for by July 18 he was back at the Cobourg, playing Taffy in *Tom John Catty*.

Little Benjamin was christened on July 27 in the near-by church of St. Mary Whitechapel . . . and here his record ends. That he died as an infant is clear, for he is not once mentioned in the annals of this child-loving family; but the place, the time and the manner of his death are unrecorded, though it may have been in the cholera epidemic of 1832 when babies died like flies. Only a line of rusty ink on the yellowed parchment proves that he existed at all. There is not even the corresponding line that would have rounded off his life.

At the end of the summer the Chit-Chat column of the *Weekly Times* throws out hints which suggest that a fierce battle of intrigue was raging behind the scenes. In date order they read:

Sept. 4th: The Garrick will open in October, although the contrary has been stated.

- Sept. 25th: The Garrick will *perhaps* open as announced.  
 Oct. 9th: The Garrick has got rid of certain encumbrances, and an arrangement with Elton has secured them good houses.  
 Oct. 23rd: A dead set was made at the Garrick Theatre at Sessions, but the 'd——d good-natured peeples' (*sic*) failed.  
 Nov. 11th: The managers of the Garrick, by the theatre becoming duly licensed, have got rid of many restraints, and are proceeding with determined and well-patronised exertion. "THE EVIL EYE" and Signor Valli have been the attractions.

Farrell too has his eye on the Corporal (the play-going public)—an "Evil Eye"; but out of evil proceeded good; at least, good houses have rewarded a judicious selection of entertainments, from farce to tragedy.

It is a pity allusive gossip-writers do not remember that in less than a hundred years they and their targets will be dead and the point of their innuendoes lost. Evidently Farrell had again been making trouble with the Magistrates, but had failed to prevent the Garrick from getting its licence. One "encumbrance" may have been Freer, who, to judge by the few extant playbills, was balancing neatly on the fence between Conquest and Farrell. As early as April 1831 he was back at the Pavilion, playing the name-part in *Virginius*. Freer was a tragedian with a good following in the East End, and no doubt managers were glad to get him on his own terms.

It is surprising to find Elton still at the Garrick, but possibly Elliston's death during the summer had automatically cancelled his arrangements with the Surrey. At all events, Conquest pursued the Shakespeare policy during the autumn, giving *King Lear* (juxtaposed with *Peter Bell, the Waggoner*). Other plays undertaken were: *Guy Mannering*, with Benjamin as Dominie Sampson and "Mrs. Henry" as Meg Merrilees (a favourite character, incidentally, with the Beverleys at the Regency); *The Rivals*, and *Werner*, with a "Mr. Mason, from Edinburgh" in the title rôle. The Christmas pantomime was *The Fairy of the Feathered Tribe, or Harlequin Cock Robin* (Clara Beverley being the Fairy), which, with inconsequent topicality, included a spectacle of the Royal Procession setting out from Somerset House to open the new London Bridge.

The year 1832 opened with a tremendous drive on the part of the Minor theatres for the repeal of the Act which curtailed their activities so as to uphold the monopoly of the two Patent Houses. A meeting of "Minor" proprietors was called in January, the composition of which preserves the names of the theatres then open and the men representing them. At it were present:

Messrs.: Serle, Grey, representing the Cobourg.

Williams	„	Sadler's Wells.
Farrell	„	the Pavilion.
Davidge	„	the City.
Macfarren	„	the Queen's.
Young	„	the Royal Orange (Pimlico).
Osbaldiston	„	the Surrey.
Raymond	„	the Olympic.

(The last-named theatre belonged to Madame Vestris, who had sent a male substitute. Some derogatory remarks were passed on her choice of Raymond—regarded as a mere underling.)

An interesting point is the omission of the Garrick from the list. The reason is not far to seek: its proprietors were in deep waters financially, and in February it "passed the hammer." One paper (*The Town*) prints a rumour that the prospective purchaser was a Mr. Solomons; but the *Sunday Times* reports the sale in the following cryptic terms:

"Bidding commenced at £1,000 and the theatre was knocked down for £1,750. No information was given as to the purchasers. The gentlemen holding it attributed their loss to want of capital."

By mid-March the theatre was open again, with the veteran actor William Dowton in Shakespearian plays, supported by a West End company: Mr. Hunt (of Covent Garden), Mr. Cobham, Mrs. Cramer Plumer and Miss S. Phillips. A varied programme included *King Henry IV* (with Dowton as Falstaff), *Macbeth*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Virgilius*, *Julius Caesar*, *Charles XII*, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* and *Othello*, besides some attractively titled melodramas and farces.

This fare, however, was not to the audience's taste. By the end of April our invaluable gossip-writer of the *Weekly Times* was recording:

"We seldom visit the Pavilion, but we hear it pays. . . . We cannot say anything at present of the other two establishments called the Garrick and the Strand Theatre. Nature is said to abhor a vacuum. Some managers cannot, or——. Two established favour-

ites have been 'fretting their hour' at these houses, Dowton and Rayner (the former not surpassed in his work); but we are sore afraid their fretting is not confined to *the* hour."

In plain English—the Garrick was still in trouble.

What were Benjamin and Clarissa doing meanwhile? Well, if their first venture into management had ended disastrously, they still had their youthful resilience, their gaiety and talent, which they could use elsewhere. They spent the summer and autumn of 1832 at Astley's.

Clarissa was on her toes again. In fact, her billing in June as "Equestriana Sweepstakes" suggests the intriguing possibility that she was appearing as a bare-back rider and dancer. But these circus acts were the traditional sphere of a few special families, and since there is nothing to connect Clarissa with any such activities, it is more probable that she merely rode round the ring and then dismounted to dance on the stage.

George Conquest, as an elderly man, stated that his mother had played Columbine "simultaneously" at Astley's and at Covent Garden, but we cannot find a playbill of the latter theatre bearing her name. The recorded Columbine in 1832 was Miss Inverarity.

Astley's was famous for its feats of horsemanship. Under Philip and John Astley—father and son—and later in the hands of Ducrow, it offered large and lavish spectacles, somewhat on the lines of a Royal Olympia Tournament: battles by land or sea, involving plenty of hard riding, boats manœuvring on real water, and a display of Greek fire.

It was the only theatre in London to possess both a circus ring and a fully appointed stage. The latter, as described by Charles Dibdin,<sup>1</sup> was indeed remarkable.

"The Proscenium is large and movable, for the convenience of widening and heightening the stage, which is perhaps the largest and most convenient in London, and is terminated by immense platforms or floors, rising above each other, and extending the whole width of the stage. They are exceedingly massive and strong. The horsemen gallop and skirmish over them, and they will admit a carriage, equal in size and weight to a mail coach, to be driven across them. They are, notwithstanding, so constructed as to be placed and removed in a short space of time, by manual labour and mechanism. When exhibited, they are masked with scenery,

<sup>1</sup> "History and Illustrations of the London Theatres," 1828.

representing battlements, heights, bridges, mountains, etc. There are several very considerable inlets and outlets to and from the stage and the stables, which communicate with each other."

The audiences were vociferous and uninhibited. Here is a picture of them.<sup>1</sup>

"A great proportion had doffed their coats and sat with open shirt collars and sleeves tucked up to the shoulder. Nightcaps of every variety of colour were there—mainly white, blue and red. Talking, shouting, fighting, singing, eating and drinking are the primary gratifications; the neighbouring cook-shops were stripped of their viands, and bottles of every description, from the little pocket-pistol to the three-gallon stone jar, were handed round."

In the heat and noise of Astley's, amid the night-caps and "pocket-pistols," the smell of horses, dogs and gunpowder, Benjamin and Clarissa passed the summer months with one dominant thought—to get back to the Garrick. Benjamin had one essentially Jewish characteristic—that supple tenacity which is best expressed by the phrase *reculer pour mieux sauter*. At Astley's he had met his old colleague Edward Gomersal, who had some capital and was ready to hazard it in management.

Early in October Benjamin was still at Astley's, playing the valet Lopez in *The Shepherd King*, but on October 7 this notice appeared in the *Sunday Times*: "Gomersal and Conquest have taken the Garrick Theatre. They open on the 15th."

They had, however, reckoned without Mr. Agar. Who Mr. Agar may have been—a friend of Farrell, a man who disliked theatres on principle or merely the noise and disorder to which in those days they gave rise—we have no idea. But he put a spoke in Benjamin's wheel.

When application was made on behalf of Francis Wyman and Benjamin Conquest (Gomersal's name, oddly enough, does not appear) for a renewal of the Garrick licence, it was refused. The reason given was that Mr. Agar had written, complaining of the house as a nuisance "from the assemblage of the lowest characters, the admission being only 6d.," and cautioning the Magistrates against renewing the licence to the applicants, who were insolvent.

It may have been some consolation to Benjamin to know that he did not suffer alone; for at the same time the Middlesex Magistrates refused renewal licences:

<sup>1</sup> *The Town*, June 19, 1832.

" . . . to White Conduit House, on the ground that theatrical performances have been permitted there, contrary to law; the Eagle Tavern and Grecian Saloon, City Road, on the ground that it is a nuisance to the neighbourhood; the Orange Coffee House, Pimlico, as being a nuisance to the neighbourhood and being a place where theatrical representations take place; to the Garrick Theatre, as not managed by responsible persons, and on other grounds; to the Portman Theatre as being unfinished, and to the Strand Theatre, on the ground of trespassing on patent privileges."

The last-mentioned objection is probably the real one: this drastic wiping out of the lesser houses represented a victory of the "Majors" over the "Minors."

Licensed or not, the Garrick opened to schedule on October 15, with Moncrieff's *Pride of Blood, or The Child of Mystery*. Gomersal played the Solitary, and Conquest, Pedro Polo. Accompanying it was a Ballet called *The Soldier's Bride*, in which Clarissa danced the title rôle, attractively named "Rose Beanfield," with a bouquet of sisters—Primrose, Bluebell, Cowslip and Tulip—two of whom were her real sisters, Miss Bennett and Miss S. Bennett. A fortnight later the play was *Lochimvar*, with Gomersal as James of Scotland and Conquest as Sandy. These two pieces have been handed down only as playbills—the newspapers say nothing about them.

What happened next is a matter of conjecture. The *Weekly Times*, which had so meticulously chronicled the progress of the Garrick during its first season, remains silent. No advertisements appear in the press. But on April 14, 1833, the *Weekly Times* notes:

"GARRICK: This really neat little theatre, *after a profitable season under the commendable management of Messrs Conquest and Gomersal*," (our italics) "was reopened for a short time on Monday, under the superintendence of Mr. Bedford, formerly of the Queen's and City theatres."

It looks as though the Garrick, unperturbed, had gone calmly on with its plans. A notice served on all Minor theatres the previous Christmas had pointed out that:

"Every person who shall act, represent or perform . . . any interlude, tragedy, comedy, opera, play, farce or other entertainment on the stage . . . without the authority or licence mentioned in the Act of Parliament of 10 Geo. II, cap. 58, is subject to a penalty of £50."

But by that time the law of "10 Geo. II, cap. 58" was practically a dead letter. The penalty was rarely imposed, and if by chance it

was, there was a “gentleman’s agreement” among the Minor proprietors to have a whip around and share the fine amongst them.

Perhaps the complete absence of publicity during the season of 1832–33 is deliberate: everyone knew that the Garrick was carrying on (and apparently with success), but there was no need to advertise that the law was being flouted. The essential, from Benjamin’s point of view, was that he was back in his theatre and meant to stay there.



Clara Conquest as Irene in *Bluebeard's Wife, or Fatal Curiosity* (Astley's 1840).  
Aged 16

## • CHAPTER V

### *"Waterloo" at the Garrick*

BETWEEN 1833 and 1846 Benjamin Conquest consolidated his position, developing from an insolvent young actor into a respected East End manager. To keep himself and his growing family he had three sources of income: the steady traffic of the Garrick tavern, with the extra money gained by letting its saloons; the intermittent revenues of the theatre; and his own earnings as an actor.

Not all was harmony in his relations with his partner, judging by this clipping (undated and untitled):

"The Garrick demands our attention, under the management of Gomersal and Conquest, who both do their best to please, although it is said that they sometimes fight over the division of profit and the arrangement of accounts; however, it is clear that the public do not suffer from their differences, so, for all we care, they may fight it out."

Besides the theatre performances, there were nightly "Harmonic Meetings" in the spacious rooms of the tavern. According to one advertisement the Chair was taken by Mr. Charles Sloman, and the singers were Messrs. T. Martin, J. Davis and Hull.

Sloman (whose real name was Solomon) was a character. He is the original of "that merry little wag, Nadab the Improvisatore"—or, as we would now say, night-club entertainer—in Thackeray's novel *The Newcomes*. His speciality was to compose rhymes "taking off" the assembled company, as he sat at the piano. The verse invented by Thackeray is presumably a fair specimen:

*A military gent I see—and while his face I scan,  
I think you'll agree with me—he came from Hindostan;  
And by his side sits laughing free—a youth with curly head,  
I think you'll all agree with me—that he were best in bed.*

*Chorus (by all in the room)*

*Ritolderol — ritolderol — ritolderolderay*

But though musical and witty, Sloman was no vocalist. An amusing story is told of him by Johnny Gideon. Once when singing at a Jewish benefit at the City of London theatre, he selected his own composition, *The Maid of Judah*. "No more shall the Children of Judah sing. . . ." he began throatily—to be interrupted by a shout from the gallery: "I should think not, with a voice like yours!"

Now that the Garrick was no longer a novelty it did not get much publicity. During the autumn of 1833 we have a note of only one play—*Outward Bound, or the Fatal Wreck*, which united in its cast Freer, Gomersal and Conquest, with Lawrence, Denvil, Mrs. Pope and Mrs. Gomersal.

In April 1834 the theatre staged one of the always popular "Napoleon" plays. This piece, called *Destiny, or the Red Man of Rue St. Roch*,<sup>1</sup> had been written for Gomersal, but as he was ill the part of Napoleon was played by Freer. The low comedy, as usual, fell to Benjamin:

"Conquest was a somewhat short Grenadier of the Imperial Guard, who, having served under Napoleon, conceived himself at liberty to take some freedom with his great Leader, which military etiquette and elevated rank do not always tolerate, but coming from a fellow-soldier, devotedly attached to his fortunes, they appear to amuse rather than annoy. His acting was true to the author's intention, and many parts of it considerably amused the audience."

At the end of the summer the theatre opened for the season after redecoration. Private boxes with rich, burnished gold ornaments had been built, and the gallery considerably enlarged. The programme comprised a melodrama, *Murder Hole*, and a farce, *The Court Jester*, in which Benjamin diverted the house as a "hot baked tater" merchant.

In April 1835 the Garrick was let to a West End company, headed by Mr. Archer of Drury Lane, who played in *Bertram*. Others were Mr. Haines of the Haymarket, Mrs. West of Drury Lane, and Miss Langley of Sadler's Wells. The repertory included *Austerlitz* and *The Dog of Montargis*.

During a good part of the summer the theatre remained closed. One play presented by the resident company was based on *The Last Days of Pompeii* and has an interesting name on the bill—Miss

<sup>1</sup> The "Red Man" was Napoleon's Familiar.

## "WATERLOO" AT THE GARRICK

(Thérèse) Cushnie, later a well-known dancer at the Grecian Theatre. Here, she is a Dancing Slave.

In January 1836, Clarissa played Princess Zulema in *The Bronze Horse, or the Statue Warrior*.

Freer, who now had "star" billing, was back at the Garrick in 1836. He played the title rôles in *Gilderoy* and *Marchiali, or the Iron Mask of the Bastille*, and Jaffier in *Venice Preserved*, with Mrs. H. Cramer as Belvidera. A piece about Terry Alt's atrocities in Ireland, called *The Bog Fiend*, had Freer as Martin Brophim and Conquest as his man, Rodykin. In the same programme Clarissa played Angeline in a farce, *The Secret*—one of her last appearances as an actress. Her daughter Clara, now twelve, made her début as Charlie in *Gilderoy*.

The main success of 1836 was *John Stafford*, which ran for a solid nine weeks—a phenomenon at that period, when a nine-day run was considered good business. This was a domestic drama, based on a real case, about the murder of a miser on a farm near Horsham, in circumstances that led to his innocent son being charged with parricide. Much of the success was due to a striking set, in which half the stage was darkened to represent a robbers' cave. Conquest played an innkeeper, Simon Whitesand.

For his benefit on June 30 Benjamin staged an amusing reversal of rôles—Freer, the tragedian, appearing in low comedy as "Jerry Sneak," while he himself took the heroic part of William Tell. To make sure that the audience did not take him too seriously, he was also a clown in the pantomime! (Until later in the century, pantomimes were not restricted to Christmas: they were often played at Easter and Whitsun, and also at inaugural performances and benefits.)

Already the Conquests, who were to become such famous pantomimists, were specialising in this line. In January 1837 they claimed their Christmas Pantomime, *Hicory Diccory Dock, or Harlequin the Little Red Rat*, as "the best in London"—an ambitious statement, considering the small sum spent on it. (About this time a list of pantomime costs includes "Sadler's Wells, £150" and "Garrick, £30" . . . figures that make one gasp!) Their 1839 pantomime, described as "a favourite," had the pretty title: *The Singing Trees and the Golden Waters*.

At last, after eight years of marriage, Benjamin achieved every man's ambition—a son to carry on his name. On May 4, 1837, there was born at the Garrick Tavern George Augustus Oliver, the first of the family to become officially a Conquest.

George made his first public appearance at St. Mary White-chapel on May 31, when he was given his grandfather's name; his second shortly afterwards at the Garrick, being carried on stage by his father in a matrimonial farce, *Mrs. White*. As soon as his own feet would carry him he was cast for child parts in several plays: *Peter Bell*, *the Waggoner*, *Isabella*, *The Harp of Altenburg*, *The Bride of Aldgate* and *The Stranger*. These, like good Victorian children, were seen and not heard—just as well, perhaps, for George grew up with a pronounced stammer. Amilie, the eldest of his three sisters, was born in the summer of 1838.

Curiously enough, now that the theatre was on a sounder basis, Conquest and Gomersal sub-let it for over a year. Their names appear as joint managers in January 1838, but on March 10 the theatre was opened for the summer season by a Mr. Parry, advertising "an entirely new management and company." The latter included that very popular actress, Mrs. Fitzwilliam. Her appearance was postponed owing to bereavement, but at the end of March she did actually play Nanette in *Mischief-Making* and Harry Halcyon in *The Middy Ashore*.

About this time the Press noted, in a sporting spirit:

"The City of London, the Pavilion and the Garrick are now yard-arm and yard-arm, but, as we always feel inclined to the lesser craft, we hope the Garrick, under its spirited pilot, will be able to *Parry* off all attacks."

The Pavilion was also sailing under fresh colours, as John Farrell had left it in March 1838, and it had reopened on Easter Monday under the direction of Mr. Yates. Farrell, who had come so near to ruining the Garrick, and who had been able to boast of prosperous seasons when his smaller rival was on the rocks, had now himself fallen upon evil times. After leaving the Pavilion he did not attempt to re-enter the theatre world but went to Boulogne, where he died in April 1848.

Meanwhile Mrs. Yarnold, who was to be one of his successors at the Pavilion, was getting into hot water at the Garrick, as we see from the following notice, posted up in the theatre on June 14, 1838:

"In consequence of the shameful and scandalous conduct of Mrs. Edwin Yarnold in disappointing the public last evening at the Garrick Theatre by not attending to the duties for the discharge of which she was legally engaged and paid for; and no intimation whatever being given to the management, the public are respectfully requested to visit their censure on the offending Party, and not on the Manager, who has been so shamefully treated by her.

“WATERLOO” AT THE GARRICK

“The part of Alice Fitzarnold in *The Bride of Aldgate* will be sustained this evening and during the week by Mrs. Atkinson, late Miss Stilsbury.”

When the Garrick reopened in the autumn it was under the sole proprietorship of Freer, with Vining as his Acting Manager. The *Theatrical Register* welcomed him with the remark: “Freer’s general civility would alone guarantee a plentiful attendance, let alone the numberless novelties he is producing.”

A less happy note is struck, however, at the New Year, when we read the following cryptic note (given with its original punctuation): “At the Garrick there has been something not the thing, for Vining has gone! The house, in an uproar!!! Examinations required!!!! and candles in request, to look—for what?” What indeed? Can the end-of-year audit have shown that the books did not balance?

Fresh trouble struck the theatre in the following summer, when the first night of *Gold Dust*, on July 24, 1839, was the occasion of a riot. The play, based on a robbery from St. Katherine’s Docks in the preceding February, was resented by the Jews in the neighbourhood—presumably because the villains of the piece were represented as being of their race—and they turned up in force to shout it down. Order was only restored when the leading man, Denvil, descended from the stage, collared the ringleaders, and marched them off to the police-station.

Another disturbance in January 1840, due to a play about the Anti-Corn-Laws agitation, called *The Rebels’ Victim, or the Manchester Rioters*, brought a sharp reprimand from the Press:

“The production of such drama is highly censurable. Politics, polemics, and all such matter should be carefully excluded from the stage, where, if they have any tendency at all, it is certainly not a beneficial one.”

Benjamin Conquest’s inclusion in the series of sketches of popular favourites called “Actors by Daylight,” in December 1838, shows that his reputation was established. It is a valuable document, founded on a personal interview, and containing his own story of his early life. The illustration contrasts strikingly with the earlier drawing of “Billy Barlow.” Although only thirty-four, Benjamin has lost his elfin look and acquired solidity. He is still handsome, with his fine dark eyes and arched brows, but the lower part of his face has thickened, with the hint of a double chin above his tight

stock. Not exactly fat, he is definitely square: the foot-loose Lincoln Imp has become Mine Host of the Garrick Tavern.

At the time this interview was given, Benjamin was playing comedy parts at Sadler's Wells. He opened there, under the management of Honner, on June 4, 1838, as Simon Slagg in *The Rye-House Plot*, and took his farewell benefit on September 25, 1839, when he sang a comic song: "Such a Getting Up Stairs!" In between these dates he played some thirty or forty parts, of which his most outstanding success was in *Oliver Twist*. Of this it was said in *Actors by Daylight*:

"Conquest as Bumble seemed absolutely to revel in parochial business. Board of Guardians was depicted in his eyes, the dietary table in his nose, and when he spoke we observed two or three boys in the gallery to shrink again."

Peter Hanley, who saw Conquest at Sadler's Wells, described him as "a capital low comedian." Later on he explains somewhat apologetically that the adjective "low" implies no disrespect towards the actors whom he qualifies by it, but is used in its technical sense of "broadly humorous," as distinct from the "light" comedian who specialised in high or drawing-room comedy.

The descriptions of characters in the playbills give an idea of the type of part allotted to a low comedian. Thus we find Benjamin playing: in *Kohal Cave*, Peter Pawks—"a Slang-Wanger Keeper of a Public, and a regular-built Yankee"; in *Black-Ey'd Susan*, Gnat-brain; in *Life as it is, or The Convict's Child*, Lily, "a ci-devant Footman, devoted to Love, Bacchus and Literature, though more to the Rosy God than either of the other two"; in *The Merchant's Daughter*, Lucius Junius Cato Snowball, "Servant to the Earl, attached to literature and Fanny Farthingale" (the soubrette of the piece). It is interesting to note that he also played Wormwood in *The Lottery Ticket*—a part afterwards made famous by Robson.

Whilst her husband was away Clarissa carried on as hostess at the Garrick Tavern, ably assisted by Clara, who though barely fifteen was already a honey-pot to the youths of the neighbourhood. Small like her mother, with tip-tilted nose, sparkling eyes and tossing dark curls, Clara was growing more attractive every day. A cheeky rhyme in the local paper (hand-dated 1840, but evidently

“WATERLOO” AT THE GARRICK

by mistake, as Benjamin’s engagement at Sadler’s Wells was a year earlier) sums up the situation:

*Friend Conquest, mind your P’s and Q’s,  
While you are acting at the Wells,  
Remember who’s with all the Jews,  
Surrounded by the snobby swells.*

*All round your bar a sight we see  
Of eyes directed to Miss Clara,  
And lots in chat with Mrs. C.,  
A-swearing nobody is fairer.*

*When puss is out the mice will play,  
And swing their tails about, so frisky,  
Just look at one or two old rats  
That give a wink—drinking whisky.*

In case this should not be sufficiently explicit, the point is rammed home with a prose postscript:

“There is an amorous little Snip who may be seen here nightly, taking his grog and paying certain addresses to Miss Clara. How far little Davy I—— will succeed in producing a sensation in the breast of the fair, we cannot possibly at present say, but shall report progress.”

Progress was apparently negative, if we judge by a further paragraph, headed facetiously: “*The Garrick’s Head, Leman Street, by Little Conquest the Comedian,*” and signed with the engaging pseudonym “Ikey-Spikey.”

“Tom Glessing would be better employed in attending to his business, and not playing with the charming Clara, who laughs and talks to all, but thinks nothing of Collimore, the son of the dealer in marine stores, who nightly makes a fool of himself by smoking a penny cigar and taking a glass of half-and-half, which generally gets into his head. He then gammons to be remarkably fond of Clara; but this poor silly fool will never please while he wears dickies, as Clara says she likes to see a clean shirt. But this ragged boy has a powerful rival in——

“Bill Pouter, the bouncing, bullying Whitechapel lad, who comes down in a greasy tile and old butcher’s coat—talks of spending sovereigns, punching heads, drinking wine, enslaving pretty women, with as much impudence as a bona fide gentleman, the reverse of which he certainly is. . . .”

And so on, through a catalogue of riff-raff suitors.

Everyone assumed that the child was Benjamin's daughter, and in later years he treated her with generosity, referring to her husband as his son-in-law and financing him on several occasions. As she grew up she became a useful little actress. In 1836, aged only twelve, she played a sixteen-year-old girl in *The Highwayman*; between 1839 and 1842 she was already taking adult parts—such as Winifred Wood in *Jack Sheppard*, and Lady Willoughby in *The Brothers' Duel*. She must also have had a good singing voice, for when Collins and Grattan took the theatre in the summer of 1841 for an opera season, they retained her in the cast.

In August 1843, however, Fate—in the shape of Charles Dillon—stepped in and took her from the Garrick. The play was *Macbeth*, which seemed to have some occult influence on the lives of the Conquest family. Dillon, with John Douglass, the lessee of the Marylebone theatre, had taken the Garrick for his own benefit, advertising that it was his last appearance but three in the East End, owing to a prolonged booking at the Marylebone. He, of course, played the Thane, and Mrs. West was his Lady Macbeth. Clara Conquest was not in the cast, but no doubt Douglass noticed the pretty girl around the tavern, and decided that he could use her as a *soubrette*.

It would be interesting to know just why Clara deserted the Garrick for the Marylebone. Perhaps, being young and ambitious, she saw it as a step towards the West End; perhaps the forcing-house atmosphere of amorous "old rats" and greasy butcher-boys nauseated her; perhaps it irked her to act as nursemaid to three little children (for George and Amilie had now been joined by Laura); perhaps she already loved Charles Dillon. Be that as it may, in the autumn of 1843 Clara left the Garrick and never came back.

This was the year when the Act limiting the scope of the minor theatres was at last repealed. John Douglass, the elder, was the first proprietor to take advantage of the new freedom. Seizing the opportunity with both hands he reopened the Marylebone—described by Alfred Bunn as "one of the most difficult theatres, in or near London, into which to drag an audience"—with an astonishingly varied repertory. Here are two typical bills:

June 19th, 1843: *Hamlet* (with Dillon as the Prince),  
*The Drover's Dog*.  
 To conclude with  
*The Black Sentinel*.

“WATERLOO” AT THE GARRICK

November, 1844: *Brutus, or The Fall of Tarquin.*

The Fifth Act of *Henry IV.*

Wonderful performance of Mons. Hulin on the Revolving Pole;  
followed on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday by *Pretty Alice of Portsmouth*, and on Friday, Saturday, by *The Dumb Slave, or The Lion of Mysore.*

Douglass, by the way, was a man of great spirit and energy, who had distinguished himself in the fight for the rights of the “Minors,” to the extent of being imprisoned as their champion. He was also, it is said, the best hornpipe dancer in London—not even excepting T. P. Cooke, of *Black-Ey’d Susan* fame.

His stage-manager, playwright and leading man was Charles Dillon, who as a boy of fourteen had already stage-managed for him at the City of London theatre. The company in 1844 also included Elsler the tightrope walker, three German dwarfs, an American giant, twenty-four dancers and a performing dog.

With the birth of a daughter, Clara, to the Dillons, and of her own child Isabella, in 1845, Clarissa had the unusual experience of becoming a mother and a grandmother in the same year. The family of the elder Conquests was now complete.

When he lay down on the night of November 3, 1846, Benjamin must have thought that the course of his life was settled: he would go on building up the prestige of the theatre and the goodwill of the tavern, until young George was old enough to take the management out of his hands. Clarissa asked him drowsily from the depths of the four-square Victorian bed how the new play was going, he was able to assure her that all was well—before coming upstairs he had made a tour of inspection.

The piece was that sure “winner,” *The Battle of Waterloo*, with Gomersal in the lead. When first given at Astley’s in 1824, it had created a furore and, with its companion piece *The Fall of Moscow*, had established Gomersal’s reputation and earned him the sobriquet of “Napoleon.” Thousands of Londoners had seen him, with his snuff-box, his boots and breeches, green artillery coat and white facings, surmounted by the well-known grey riding-coat, and the historical chapeau-bras. He had even been immortalised by Thackeray, who sent his Colonel Newcome to Astley’s, where: “He beheld the Battle of Waterloo with breathless interest, and was

amazed—amazed, by Jove, Sir—at the prodigious likeness of the principal actor to the Emperor Napoleôn”; and celebrated in a Bon Gaultier ballad:

*What's here? At Astley's every night, the play of Moscow's fall!*  
*NAPOLEON, for the thousandth time, by Mr. Gomersal.*

It was a typical Astley production—large, noisy and spectacular, with plenty of cannon-fire—very similar to the piece called *The Wars of Cromwell*, which had been playing at the Amphitheatre in 1841, when it was burnt down.

Between four and five next morning, P.C. 96H was proceeding on his beat along the Tenter-Ground, with that majestic amble which is the hall-mark of the British policeman, when he saw smoke and sparks coming from the roof of the Garrick theatre. P.C. 96H no longer proceeded—he ran. He ran a long way, for the building occupied a large stretch of waste land extending from behind the houses on the west side of Lemn Street to the Tenter-Ground by St. Mark's Church, and only from that spot could the exterior be seen. The entrance was along a narrow passage beside the tavern in Lemn Street. Before the policeman could reach it flames were shooting through the theatre roof.

It was not easy to rouse the family in the tavern. After the long, tiring day they slept soundly. When at last Benjamin, still half-dazed, rushed into the nursery where little George lay sleeping he found the room aswirl with smoke and the child almost suffocated. Wrapped in blankets, George was carried into the open air and revived—to remember the experience as the first of several narrow escapes from death.

By this time the neighbourhood was stirring. Flames shot high above the roof-tops and it looked as though the whole street might be involved. If the fire reached Scott's gunpowder factory there would be a major catastrophe. Fortunately the brigade could draw upon the mains of the East London waterworks, so there was no fear of their hoses running dry. They were able to halt the flames short of the powder-factory and the Jews' Orphan Asylum, but the theatre itself was doomed.

Having taken his family to safety and left Clarissa to comfort the frightened children, Benjamin rounded up some of the actors who were lodging near by, and together they made one attempt after another to break into the green-room and dressing-rooms and rescue some of their belongings. All their costumes were there, these being their personal property and stock-in-trade; the

orchestra, too, had left their instruments in the pit. Each time the smoke and flames drove them back, and at last the attempts were called off, just before the roof fell in.

The firemen then concentrated upon saving the tavern. In less than three hours from the time the outbreak was discovered, the entire theatre had been consumed, with the exception of the staircase, and the flames were dying down.

We can imagine Benjamin's feelings as he called his company together later that day, in the drenched and smoke-grimed tavern, to take stock of the situation. Sixteen years of his life lay in ashes behind him. He was over forty, with a wife and four young children dependent upon him—and he was facing something like ruin. Andrew Ducrow had died—of a broken heart, it was said—a few months after the destruction of his theatre; but that was a solution unworthy of a man called Conquest. Strange, too, must have been the thoughts of “Napoleon” Gomersal, who for the second time had seen the destruction of a theatre with which he was closely connected. (Newspapermen at the time, eager to find a striking coincidence, stated that *The Battle of Waterloo* had been the fatal piece in both cases, but this is disproved by Astley's playbills.)

Discussing the cause of the outbreak, they concluded that a bit of burning gun-wadding had lodged in the “flies” when the cannon was fired, and had gone on smouldering for hours until it finally burst into flame. Like all theatres, the place was full of inflammable material, and in its conversion from a cotton-factory it had been so built that the draught sucked the flames upwards as if through a funnel.

As soon as the disaster became known, offers of help poured in from the neighbouring theatres. Within three days, Honner, of the City of London (under whose management Benjamin had played at Sadler's Wells in 1838), Nelson Lee and Johnson of the Standard, Thorne of the Pavilion, Samuel Lane of the Britannia and Wade of the Effingham, had offered the use of their theatres for benefit performances. The proceeds were divided among the company as compensation for the loss of their engagement and destruction of their wardrobes and musical instruments. Benjamin had the insurance on the theatre and the goodwill of the tavern, so that he was not entirely destitute.

As the Conquests never came back to the Garrick, its subsequent history does not concern us, but it can be briefly resumed here, on the basis of the Enthoven playbills.

By 1853 it had been reopened by Lawrence Levy, with the

imposing title "Albert and Garrick Royal Amphitheatre," but four years later it was up for sale. Its seating capacity was then quoted as 1,700, and the rent was £520 per annum. A bill of 1859 again gives Levy as the proprietor, but in the same year Mr. J. D. Malcolm of the Polytechnic ran it as the "Eastern Polytechnic Institute" "with a new series of entertainments." (This suggests plays rather than educational lectures.) It was again for sale in 1861, and back in Levy's hands in 1868. Two years later it was being run, apparently as a music-hall, by James Richards. Acquired in 1873 by J. B. Howe, of the Britannia, it became a serious theatre, offering Shakespearian tragedies and historical melodramas. Since the Lord Chamberlain objected to the title of "New Albert Theatre," the proprietor called it by his own name: "J. B. Howe's Theatre." His tenure was brief, and it had relapsed into a penny gaff when in 1879 Miss May Bulmer (Mrs. Sturgeon) took it for a season of plays translated from the French. In one of these the youthful Beerbohm Tree made his début as a crusty old lawyer—Sir Benjamin Buffles—with a "Song of the Gout."

A police station now occupies the site.

With the insurance money Benjamin Conquest leased a tavern next the Adelphi, called The Hampshire Hog, and in January 1848 he joined the Olympic Theatre, under the management of Davidson and Harry Spicer.

This theatre, after Madame Vestris had moved to the Lyceum, had sunk so low that at one time it was closed, except when intermittently hired by amateurs. When reopened in 1848 it had been entirely redecorated in blue, white and gold, giving a light and elegant effect. Davidson impressively launched a new tragedian, Gustavus V. Brooke, in the star rôles of Edmund Kean. (It was, by the way, as a substitute for Kean that this young Irishman had first attracted notice, many years before. Kean, as not infrequently happened in his latter years, was too "unwell" to appear, and Brooke, pushed on the stage at a moment's notice, did so well that he received an ovation.) The critics spent so much of their space upon Brooke that the rest of the company had only the briefest of mentions. There are, however, three notices of Benjamin Conquest during this season. In *The Rivals*:

"Mr. Conquest, as Acres, gave a quiet outline of the character, but evidently felt the difficulty of the undertaking and did not attempt too much."

“WATERLOO” AT THE GARRICK

then, on March 12, in *The Merchant of Venice*:

“Mr. Conquest’s Lancelot Gobbo is very laughable, but a little unction, a drop of oil, is necessary to make his acting very humorous. He is an iron-made low comedian, but exceedingly comic at times, and possessing a treasure of a face, could he but get the starch out of it.”

Both these comments sound as though Benjamin, after having had his own theatre for sixteen years, felt chilled and constrained in the new environment; or possibly he had been warned to tone down his style to meet the tastes of a West End audience. However, he soon regained his self-confidence and verve, as we see from the notice of a farce called *Lost, a Sovereign, or Never Travel During a Revolution*, which was played on April 9. This was a topical skit, relating the adventures of an attorney, Sir Louis King, who, when travelling across France to get back to England, was mistaken for King Louis Philippe—then “on the run.”

“The whole weight of the piece rested on the shoulders of Mr. Conquest, who played the bewildered lawyer to perfection. His threat of trouncing his tormentors if he only had been in his Court was ludicrous in the extreme, and his make-up for the part admirable. His first appearance was a signal for shouts of laughter.”

In spite of Brooke’s great success, it was hinted in August 1848 that the Olympic was short of money, and in March of the following year it shared the fate of the Garrick: an open gas-jet in the prompt corner set the tabs ablaze, and in an hour the theatre was destroyed. Less fortunate than Benjamin, Davidson and Spicer were uninsured.

We know little of the Conquest family during the next year or two, but a very pleasant glimpse is afforded by W. C. Day in *Behind the Footlights*. In his youth this author was a keen amateur actor, and had been the prime mover in founding a group called the Scenic Club, which used the Hampshire Hog as a rendezvous. Of Benjamin Conquest he says:

“This gentleman was our stage manager, superintending all rehearsals and performances, instructing us in the ‘business’ of the play, and affording the amateurs the advantage of his long and varied experience by every means in his power.”

Clara was touring with her husband, Charles Dillon: in December 1850 they were at Sheffield, playing Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing*.

Young George had been sent to the Collège Communal at

Boulogne, with the idea that he should turn his talent for music to good account by learning to play the violin, and eventually become leader of the Orchestra at the Saloon which his father was already planning to buy. George, however, was more interested in gymnastics, at which he carried off all the prizes. One of his school-fellows was Benoît Coquelin. They can hardly have been close friends, for the French boy was four years younger—between ten and fourteen, an abyss—but Coquelin had already one claim to distinction: his father was a pastry-cook, whose wares absorbed most of George's pocket-money.

It says a great deal for Benjamin's courage and Clarissa's thrift that, at the end of this period, they were in a position to take over from Thomas Rouse the Eagle Tavern in the City Road, with the attached Grecian Saloon, and thus come back into the theatre world.

**PART II**

**THE GRECIAN**



## CHAPTER VI

### *"Bravo Rouse" and the Grecian*

"THE GRECIAN," for nearly sixty years an oasis of light and colour in the drab lives of London's poorer citizens, arose from the vision of a man who in taste and social conscience was far ahead of his times—Thomas Rouse.

Readers will remember the Shepherd and Shepherdess tea-gardens, to which our fancy sent young Benjamin. In the middle eighteenth century, when Shepherdess Walk was as pretty as its name, it was a health resort where convalescents recruited their strength in the pure air, on farm and dairy food provided by the adjacent ale-house. A charming jingle has preserved for us the atmosphere of those days:

*To the Shepherd and Shepherdess then they go  
To tea with their wives for a constant rule,  
And next cross the road to the Fountain also,  
And there they sit so pleasant and cool,  
To see in and out  
The folk walk about,  
And gentlemen angling in Peerless Pool.*

With the cutting of the new City Road in 1761 the rural charm of the winding lane was spoiled. The neighbourhood began to go down, but the gardens—a trifle dusty and forlorn—survived until the thud of Thomas Rouse's bricks finally put the Shepherdess to flight.

Rouse, born in 1784, was a building contractor with the acumen to profit by the mushroom expansion of London. He was also a most enlightened employer, keeping the interests of his workmen always at heart. Having established his brickfields he pulled down the little ale-house and rebuilt it as a tavern, with a "long room" on the first floor, where the bricklayers could dine by day and entertain themselves in the evening. This house he named "The Eagle." Perhaps, just as Benjamin Oliver liked the sound of "Conquest," Rouse chose the King of Birds (the feathered variety, *bien entendu*) to symbolise his own ambitions.

The first mention of the tavern by name is in 1822, when a dinner was given there to welcome Henry Hunt, M.P., on his release from prison; but it was probably completed in the previous summer, for an "Eleventh Anniversary Dinner" was reported on July 27, 1832.

Meanwhile, the waste ground lying east of the tavern had been laid out in gardens and was used for displays of various kinds—single-stick and wrestling contests and balloon ascents. Wrestling matches, with competitors from Cornwall, Devon and Ireland, were held, at first frequently and afterwards once a year, on Easter Monday. As late as 1840 there is a notice of one such match, which was disorganised by the failure of the most-fancied champion, "Giant" Jordan, to arrive.

In May 1824, the aeronaut Harris was killed on a flight starting from the Eagle grounds. The balloon had been on view at 2s. 6d. per head—a high charge, compared with the cheap admissions to the theatres of the period. But the public had plenty to see for their money. The balloon, called the "Royal George," was fifty feet high and one hundred and twenty feet in circumference. Its canoe-shaped car was lined with crimson Genoa velvet trimmed with gold lace, and draped with festoons of green and yellow silk. Mr. Harris, dressed in Naval costume and accompanied by his girl passenger, Jane Stocks, was preceded by a band which marched down the main alley playing "See the Conquering Hero comes." The girl, we hear, was quite intrepid—she was no doubt in a devil-may-care mood, having quarrelled with her fiancé and given up her job at a confectioner's shop just previously.

A raised platform gave sightseers a better view of the balloon as it was filled. It rose at 4.30 p.m. and crashed half-an-hour later, when trying to land in Beddington Park, near Carshalton. Harris was killed, but his passenger escaped with shock and severe bruising. At the inquest it was suggested that Harris had accidentally pulled a cord actuating a valve that had the effect of a modern rip-cord.

Rouse was unlucky with aeronautics, for two years later, when Green's balloon was on view, there was an accident due to the collapse of some scaffolding, in which some half-dozen people were injured.

Anticipating by a century the Italian "Dopolavoro" movement, Rouse inaugurated weekly Harmonic Meetings in the Long Room, where professional musicians, hired at his own expense, performed for the workmen. So good was his taste in music that soon the

general public were asking to pay for admission. The charge, originally 2*d.*, was soon raised to 6*d.* Rouse built a pavilion in the grounds to accommodate the increased audience, and so the Eagle was added to the list of those Saloon Theatres which were a feature of the early nineteenth century.

These, though as yet the term had not been coined, were “Music Halls” in the literal sense—large rooms in or adjoining a tavern, where its customers could enjoy a sing-song while they drank their beer and munched the pies and sandwiches on a ledge before them. The audience was predominantly male: not until the 1830’s did respectable women begin to accompany their menfolk to the Saloons and minor theatres.

The name “Grecian Saloon” is first mentioned in October 1831 when the (evidently new) building is described in detail. Its name was derived from the murals by Philip Phillips—a pupil of Clarkson Stanfield—showing mythological figures against a landscape background. The room, an oblong octagon in shape, was further ornamented with ceiling figures, painted glass and ornaments devised by Mr. W. Orme; it held a self-playing piano and a large organ. The doorway was brought from Wanstead House in Essex.

After the coronation of William IV, Rouse bought up the ornamental fittings used at Westminster Abbey, for a Gothic entrance to his gardens. Later a concealed set of bells, made by Mr. Barker, was fixed in one of its pinnacles. To the delight of connoisseurs it rang the difficult peal of “Steadman’s caters.”

The garden itself—grandiloquently styled “Royal Eagle Coronation Pleasure Grounds”—was greatly embellished in the spring of 1832. On March 20 a newspaper advertisement announced that the Proprietor:

“... has nearly completed a novel and peculiar pleasure ground, comprising a Chinese Pavilion and Cosmorama Terrace with views; a dripping-rock, four new cosmoramas, and a number of well-executed pleasing landscapes.”

A month later, Rouse had thought up a new word, when he stated:

“Parties may be accommodated with private boxes, may promenade the terraces, view the *cosmorama*, and examine the paintings.”

That many people availed themselves of his invitation is attested by a reporter in May 1832:

‘There were between 5,000 and 6,000 highly respectable persons on the evening of our visit. We never saw so many happy faces,

drinking their cheerful glass and examining the Fountains, Waterfalls, and the Chinese Pavilion. The children appeared quite in raptures with the effect of the different lights, and expressed their wonder and astonishment at not being able to discover where the water came from at the top of the Dripping Rock."

A few weeks later an Aviary was installed, and then came the great attraction of the open-air Dancing Tent—forerunner of Conquest's famous dancing-platform—which is mentioned as being already in use for Waltzes and Quadrilles, though "not quite finished" on July 13, 1832.

In August the Eagle had a distinguished visitor, when the violinist Niccolo Paganini came to the gardens with a large party, but the friendly "mobbing" of an admiring crowd was too much for him and he withdrew early, assuring the disappointed proprietor that he would come again.

Rouse's establishment was acquiring a popularity which must have made it doubly exasperating when, in October 1832, it was refused a licence, as being "a nuisance to the neighbourhood." This reproach need not be taken too seriously; it was a convenient excuse when Magistrates felt ill-disposed towards the "Minors." The Grecian, however, still did not rank as a theatre, for Rouse was not invited to sit on the "Minors" Committee that year.

The set-back did not prevent the production of a variety of entertainments during the autumn and winter of 1832. On October 26 a monody in memory of Sir Walter Scott was given. A quaint note early in November states that:

"Miss Smith, in addition to her usual songs, will give a Lecture on Hearts, and occasionally a Comic Reading."

But the main attraction that winter was a Mr. Bensontag, who alternated conjuring (then called "illusions") with imitations and ventriloquism. His dummy, called "The Countess of Lilliput," represented an old lady of seventy-four.

Presumably these odds-and-ends of entertainment were an attempt to circumvent the law; but the Grecian soon emerged from its temporary disgrace. In October 1833 we read:

"This pleasant establishment has been relicensed and reopened for the musical soirées peculiar to it. Great praise is due to all the performers. Miss Smith, Howells and Wife, E. R. Chapman, and Mr. and Miss Wilson, were particularly distinguished."

(Mr. Wilson was the organist and pianist of the Saloon.)

## "BRAVO ROUSE" AND THE GRECIAN

To John Hollingshead,<sup>1</sup> who had his information from a former musical director of the Grecian, Barney Isaacson, we are indebted for a detailed description of the hall and its entertainments at this period:

"The Grecian Saloon was in 1834 a large hall standing in a small garden. It was built in what is called the Rotunda shape, with a dome roof and a large glass chandelier. It was capable of seating 600 or 700 people. Facing you on entering was the platform, which did duty as a stage, containing a large organ, a self-acting piano (which played the people in), and a grand piano. On the left was a raised dais, with an armchair for Mr. Rouse, the proprietor, who always presided.

"The performance always began with an overture. This was followed by a chorus sung by the entire company, about twelve in number, the gentlemen appearing in evening dress. About twelve songs, duets and glees followed, the first part of the programme finishing with a concerted piece. . . .

"The second part consisted of an 'entertainment' given by the whole company, seated on the platform like a troupe of Christy Minstrels without the burnt cork. The 'entertainment' was supposed to be a farce, and generally was a mutilated farce, used principally as a vehicle for song and dance. Late in 1834, the well-known dramatic author Mr. Moncrieff wrote a vaudeville called *The Kiss and the Rose*, in which coherent dialogue was used for the first time. Theatrical evolution went on. Musical farces were gradually introduced. An arrangement was made with Mr. Charles Selby, the Adelphi actor and prolific adapter, to play all his pieces. No scenery was used, and the performance took place on the platform in front of the organ. . . . The visitors were numerous and well-behaved, and amongst the audience were occasionally Charles Dickens, Tom Hood, E. L. Blanchard, J. E. Carpenter, and many other notabilities of the period."

By 1834 some very talented performers had been recruited. In one list we find:

Miss Kitty Tunstall, the ballad singer; Mrs. Waylett, one of the finest vocalists of her time; Nicola Deulin, the dancer (whose real name was Isaac Dowling); the Leclercq family, also famous dancers; Flexmore, the Clown; Mr. and Mrs. Caulfield (later of the Haymarket); Mr. Baldwin, the basso singer; and several other artists of distinction.

The gardens in this stage of development have been described by Dickens in "Miss Evans and the Eagle" (*Sketches by Boz*, published 1836):

<sup>1</sup> In his article: "A Grand Old Music-Hall," published in *Entr'acte*, June 6, 1896

“‘How ’ev’nly!’ said Miss J’mima Ivins and Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend, both at once, when they had passed the gate and were fairly inside the gardens. There were the walks, beautifully gravelled and planted—and the refreshment boxes, painted and ornamented like so many snuff-boxes—and the variegated lamps shedding their rich light upon the company’s heads—and the place for dancing ready chalked for the company’s feet—and a Moorish band playing at one end of the gardens, and an opposition military band playing away at the other. Then, the waiters were rushing to and fro with glasses of negus, and glasses of brandy-and-water, and bottles of ale, and bottles of stout; and ginger-beer was going off in one place, and practical jokes were going on in another; and people were crowding to the door of the Rotunda; and in short, the whole scene was, as Miss J’mima Ivins, inspired by the novelty, or the shrub, or both, observed—‘one of dazzling excitement.’ As to the concert-room, never was anything half so splendid. There was an orchestra for the singers, all paint, gilding and plate glass; and such an organ! Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend’s young man whispered it had cost ‘four hundred pound,’ which Mr. Samuel Wilkins said was ‘not dear neither’; an opinion in which the ladies perfectly coincided. The audience were seated on elevated benches round the room, and crowded into every part of it; and everybody was eating and drinking as comfortably as possible. Just before the concert commenced Mr. Samuel Wilkins ordered two glasses of rum-and-water ‘warm with——’ and two slices of lemon, for himself and the other young man, together with ‘a pint o’ sherry wine for the ladies, and some sweet caraway-seed biscuits.’ . . .

“The concert commenced—overture on the organ. ‘How solemn!’ exclaimed Miss J’mima Ivins, glancing, perhaps unconsciously, at the gentleman with the whiskers. . . . ‘The Soldier Tired.’ Miss Somebody in white satin. ‘Ancore!’ cried Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend. ‘Ancore!’ shouted the gentleman in the plaid waistcoat immediately, hammering the table with a stout bottle. . . . Comic song, accompanied on the organ. Miss J’mima Ivins was convulsed with laughter—so was the man with the whiskers. . . . The concert and vaudeville concluded, they promenaded the gardens.”

Lovers of Dickens will remember that the promenade ended in fisticuffs between the girls’ escorts and the two other men mentioned. The population flocking to the new houses of the City Road was a rough one and took its pleasures noisily. Perhaps it was scenes such as that described by Dickens which had led to the revocation of the licence.

# ACTORS BY DAYLIGHT AND PENCILINGS IN THE PIT.

REPUTATION IS AN IDEAL AND MOST FALSE IMPOSITION, DEGREE WITHOUT MERIT  
AND LOSS WITHOUT DESERVING. NO. 43.

No. 43.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1838

Price 2d.



MR. CONQUEST.

Benjamin Conquest in 1838

Grecian Concert as seen  
by Dickens (*ca.* 1834)



Mrs. Conquest in old age

## "BRAVO ROUSE" AND THE GRECIAN

Had the party been more adventurously-minded in the way of drinks, they might have tasted the speciality of the house—a syrupy liquid called "Capillaire" after the maidenhair fern from which it was made. Already by the end of the nineteenth century this drink was only a memory, and now the very name has been forgotten: the rebuilt Eagle serves only such drinks as can be bought elsewhere in Town.

An interesting point is Dickens' use of the word "Vaudeville." It is probable that Rouse introduced this term into England, together with the form of entertainment represented by it. The word derives from *Vau* (*Val*) *de Vire*—a locality in Normandy where musical shows with a satirical flavour and topical allusions had been current for centuries.

The Grecian advertised regularly from 1831 onwards, but only as a concert hall. In the *London Amusement Guide* for May 1836, it is described as: The Grecian Saloon, Eagle Tavern, City Road, and offers "A Concert and other Musical Entertainment every evening: Gala nights, Monday and Wednesday."

Three years later the Coronation of Queen Victoria inspired fresh developments. Rouse renewed his lease in 1837 and closed for alterations, reopening on January 1, 1838. The Saloon was now a real theatre, with a stage, scenery and other equipment, and the 1838 handbills have a far more ambitious ring:

### ROYAL EAGLE CORONATION PLEASURE GROUNDS AND GRECIAN SALOON

Unrivalled galas with brilliant fireworks and splendid illuminations, and a series of superior amusements every Monday and Wednesday.

To attempt a description of the numerous and varied sources of entertainment at this unrivalled establishment would be vain. Concerts in the open air, dancing and vaudeville in the Saloon, set paintings, cosmoramas, fountains, grottoes, statuary, singing, music, combine to render it a fairy scene, of which a due estimation can only be formed by inspection.

Around this time the Grecian recruited three performers of outstanding talent: Robert Glindon, a *buffo* singer of some merit, who wrote for the Saloon two songs that were very popular: "Biddy, the Basket Woman," and "The Literary Dustman"; Sims Reeves, the tenor, and Frederick Robson.

The first-named has been celebrated by Rouse himself in an ingenuous quatrain published by *The Town* (May 5, 1838):

*Oh, the Eagle's the house for good cheer,  
Where Glindon so merrily sings,  
For lasses and lads far and near  
Crowd in to sit under its wings.*

Sims Reeves—for many years the cartoonists' joy, by reason of his shock of black hair and walrus moustache—remained only a fortnight at the Grecian, though he lived on until 1900, taking one farewell benefit after another. When over seventy he astonished everyone by remarrying and producing a baby son.

The most famous of the three was the "great little Robson," whose real name was F. R. Brownhill. He came to the Grecian as a lad of eighteen and stayed for over ten years. Then he was seen by William Farren, who wanted him for the Olympic, and who, in order to give him the "cachet" of a major theatre, sent him for a season to Ireland, and on his return, announcing him as "from the Theatre Royal, Dublin," launched him in the West End. He remained at the Olympic, of which he eventually became Manager, until his death in 1864.

Although not yet recognised as a star, Robson was popular at the Grecian, where, in the late evening *al fresco* concerts, he sang "Villikins and his Dinah" and "The Country Fair"—in later years the mainstay of two farces at the Olympic. At the Grecian also he first created the characters of Wormwood in *The Lottery Ticket* and Joseph Earwig in *Boots at the Swan*, which he afterwards revived with great success.

Robson was very friendly with Sam Lane, of the Britannia, and the two men worked an amusing racket together. When Robson felt it was time his salary was increased he would get Lane to write to him, offering him 10s. a week more than he was getting at the Grecian. These letters were shown to Rouse, who, rather than lose Robson to the "Brit.," would give him a rise.

G. A. Sala, who wrote this actor's life, has left us a vivid picture of him:

"A little stunted fellow, not very well-favoured, not very young. Whence he came, or what he was, none knew, but everybody at last came to care. For this little stunted creature, with his hoarse voice and nervous gestures and grotesque delivery, his snarls, his leers, his hunchings of the shoulders, his contortions of the limbs, his gleaming of the eyes, and his grindings of the teeth, was a genius."

Westland Marston found in him a Dickensian quality of mingled pathos and humour, “making the heroic concealment of grief ten times more touching than its direct utterance.” This quality had full play in the farce *A Blighted Being*, where Robson represented Job Wort, a neglected and disappointed genius :

“ . . . with the double, and even simultaneous effect of convulsing the house with the absurdities of the character, and inspiring it with a sense of relief when he escapes the fancied danger that haunts him. . . . It was perhaps Robson’s union of the terrible with the droll which most recommended him to general favour.”

Madame Ristori—the Siddons of Italy—was deeply impressed by him. Although she understood practically no English, she was heard to murmur as she came away : “*Uomo straordinario!*”

Another of Robson’s outstanding successes was the miser Daddy Hardacre, in a version of the French play *La Fille d’Avaro*, where he rose to almost tragic intensity in contrasting the miser’s unselfish love for his daughter with his sordid passion for gold.

Robson was only forty-three when he died : the hardships of his early life, overwork, worry and drink had been too much for him. On hearing of his death, one of his former mates at a copper-plate engraver’s where he had worked as a boy, spoke his epitaph : “What, little Bill gone? Ah, he was a merry lad, but he’d better by half a’ stuck to the bench.”

Rouse, primarily a builder, returned most of his profits to the establishment in the form of bricks and mortar. In the spring of 1839 he pulled down the original tavern and opened the palatial new Eagle which lasted until it in turn was demolished in 1901 and rebuilt in its present smaller form. A farewell dinner in the old Eagle was given at the end of March, where good liquors and capital fare were seasoned by a poetical address delivered by the Manager, Mr. Raymond, which ended :

*Long may prosperity sustain the house  
Long may the walls resound with “Bravo, Rouse!”*

This was probably the origin of the famous Ash Wednesday dinners, when as many as 300 friends would be invited—a custom kept up by Benjamin Conquest when he succeeded to the Eagle.

On Easter Monday 1840 the Olympic Temple, intended specially to be hired by Societies and others taking benefits, was opened.

It should be clearly understood that this—like the Chinese (or Moorish) Pavilion—was just one building in the grounds of the Eagle, and never an alternative name for the establishment as a whole. Confusion on this point has been caused by a careless reference in Blanchard's Diary. After a lapse of thirty-six years he notes :

“1877, *October 26th*: Off to see the new Grecian Theatre, which opens next Monday, built on the site of the old Olympic *Pavilion* of 1841.” (Our italics.)

This has led subsequent writers to state that the Grecian was “sometimes called the Olympic Pavilion,” or that it replaced a former Saloon of that name. In point of fact, “Olympic” in newspapers of the day always designates the Wych Street theatre, controlled for many years by Madame Vestris; while “Pavilion” refers to the house in Whitechapel High Street.

Blanchard had reason to remember the Olympic Temple, for it was here that his early work *Arcadia, or the Shepherd and Shepherdess* was presented in April 1841, when the Saloon itself had been temporarily closed for alterations. The afterwards celebrated Harriet Coveney, as a girl of fourteen, played Apollo in this piece, which received “the most flattering applause from a crowded and delighted audience.”

By Whitsun the main building was open again—“thoroughly renovated, decorated and enlarged, the stage reconstituted, and its size and capabilities considerably increased.” A gallery or upper saloon had also been added. The gardens, too, had been laid out with fountains, statuary, set scenes and magic mirrors, with the added attractions of fireworks and “gas devices, occasionally.”

With the facilities given by a larger theatre, Rouse began to present Ballet and Opera, of a quality hitherto unknown in the East End. Among the most popular of his operatic productions was *La Sonnambula*, in which the heroine, found in compromising circumstances in a young man's bedroom, demonstrates her innocence by sleep-walking along the edge of a roof. Others were: *The Barber of Seville*, *La Gazza Ladra*, *Don Giovanni*, etc.<sup>1</sup> These productions were expensive, and Rouse lost heavily on them. But, as H. G. Hibbert

<sup>1</sup> Hollingshead lists the following operas, representative of the French, Italian, German and English schools: Masaniello, Fra Diavolo, Crown Diamonds, La Sirène, The Ambassadors, The Duc d'Orléans, Barber of Seville, La Gazza Ladra, Brasseur de Preston, Giralda, Postillon de Longjumeau, La Dame Blanche, Chaperon Rouge, Daughter of the Regiment, Don Pasquale, Ne Touchez pas à la Reine, Bohemian Girl, Elixir of Love, Lac des Fées, Der Freischütz, Abou Hassan, The Mountain Sylph, La Sonnambula.

“BRAVO ROUSE” AND THE GRECIAN

wittily remarks: “what he lost on the roundabouts he made on the swigs”—an estimated deficit of £2,000 a year on the theatre was offset by a profit of £5,000 on the tavern:

That money was spent freely there, is indicated by the famous rhyme:

*Up and down the City Road,  
In and out the Eagle,  
That's the way the money goes—  
Pop goes the Weasel!*

which has been explained as meaning that the tailors pawned their “weasels” (flat-irons) for drink-money. Probably, however, there has been some juggling with the words, for “Pop goes the Weasel” is an old Morris Dance tune, already well-known in the mid-eighteenth century, long before the Eagle came into existence.

There was plenty to charm money from a man's pocket. A visitor in the spring of 1841 reports:

“Song, dance, opera, farce and ballet all relieve each other, and the visitor is sure to go away delighted with the entertainment the worthy caterer has provided for him. But, as if this were not enough, other enchantments await him. Brandy and ballet-dancing, grog and glees, cakes and catches, with cigars and cascades, all allure the palate, enchant the eye, and delight the ear. The luxury of smoking, blended with the pleasure we experience in hearing music well played, can never be too highly appreciated.”

*Punch*, however, was more critical. On November 1, 1842, it made some caustic remarks about Mr. Rouse's taste:

“The exterior is ornamented with plaster casts of Apollo, Lord Nelson, Pan and the Duke of Wellington. It is situated at the end of a sacred grove, refreshed by fountains, adorned by an *al fresco* organ loft and a Chinese joss-house. The former structure is in the Grand Turkish style; whilst both are elegantly gilt and tricked out with party colours, to exhibit a purity of taste rather—perhaps—more dazzling, than some. In short, the whole presents a scene so truly Arcadian, so exquisitely Greek, that one might almost fancy oneself in a suburban tea-garden.”

To the lively young men who frequented the place, it was popularly known as “The Bird.” Can this, we wonder, be the origin of the phrase “*getting the bird*,” as applied to the noisy condemnation of a play or a music-hall turn? The audiences of Rouse's day were quite uninhibited. They smoked, ate and drank as they listened,

and if they particularly disliked what they heard—well, the oranges and pork-pies were missiles ready to hand, with which to reinforce their cat-calls.

Such scenes were never allowed to go too far, for Rouse himself—a large and imposing figure—sat every night in one of the boxes, keeping order “with an air of stern authority and a huge walking-stick like a drum-major’s staff.”

His nickname of “Bravo” (pronounced “Brayvo”) was given to him in recognition of the cheers that greeted his appearance before the curtain at the end of a show. Peter Hanley<sup>1</sup> relates more specifically:

“One evening while sitting in his box witnessing the entertainment, a waiter came and, in a hurried manner, whispered something to him. The old gentleman immediately rose from his seat and stopped the performance and, addressing the audience, requested to know whether any persons present resided in or near such-and-such a street, because if there were they would probably like to return home, for he had just heard that a fire had broken out in that street. Upon this announcement the worthy manager was vociferously cheered, and was greeted with shouts of ‘Bravo, Rouse!’, which name clung to him ever afterwards.”

In any case he well merited it. Starting from nothing, in twenty-five years he built up a thriving little theatre which acted as a cultural centre in the East End. And it is pleasant to record that, while making his own fortune, he retained his philanthropic outlook. The Grecian advertisements from 1841 onwards show that he frequently gave benefit performances in aid of deserving charities. When, on Ash Wednesday 1851, he sat down to a farewell dinner, and, after the usual speeches and presentations, rose to return thanks and wish prosperity to his successor, Benjamin Conquest, he could look back with satisfaction on a life that was both profitable and well-spent. (It was, alas! nearly at an end, for he only survived his retirement by a few months.)

In all sincerity we can echo the verdict of his contemporaries: Bravo, Rouse!

<sup>1</sup> “A Jubilee of Playgoing,” (1887).

## CHAPTER VII

### “ *Conquest of the Eagle* ”

1851 . . . the year of the Great Exhibition : the year when Britain, emerging from the Hungry Forties, entered on fifty years of power and prestige such as she had not known since the great days of Elizabeth. Benjamin Conquest had chosen an ideal time to come back to the theatre world.

Clarissa, too, freed from the cares of motherhood, with her son away at school and her pretty daughters old enough to train for the stage, was able to use her talents again. Nearly fifty now, she was finished as a dancer but she could still teach. For months past she had been training between forty and fifty girls, whom she planned to draft into the *corps de ballet* as occasion arose. She must have rejoiced at having the spacious premises of the Eagle for her dancing-school.

Preparations went ahead rapidly. The stage papers had often commented that the Eagle “Saloon” was worthy of a more dignified title. Already in 1848, reporting on Auber’s *Masaniello*, *The Era* had said : “This may truly be called the English Opera House” ; and again :

“Why this place is not *called* a theatre, we are at a loss to guess. It certainly deserves the name, for it is in every respect one. The audience portion, the elegance, comfort and convenience of every part of it, the talent of the company, the nature of the performances, and the order and regularity which attend it, fully merit the title it *should* bear—the Grecian theatre.”

And this was the title that Conquest, having taken out the requisite licence, gave it in the advertisement that resumed his policy :

“The operatic and dramatic portion of the company will consist of most of the old favourites, with the addition of several ladies and gentlemen from the different London and provincial theatres. Special care has been taken in the formation of the ballet department, which will comprise both British and foreign talent. For the

gratification of the lovers of dancing, the Temple of Terpsichore will be opened nightly as a casino, which will be conducted precisely on the same scale of liberality as other establishments of the like kind. Various novelties by several gentlemen of high literary attainments are in active preparation and will be produced with unequalled splendour and effects never before attempted at this popular place of amusements. The refreshments will claim special care from Mr. Conquest, who pledges himself that they shall be unexceptionable."

The truth of this last claim has been amply attested by all who visited the place. Clarissa saw to that. She had those qualities implicit in the word *ménagère*, which goes so far beyond plain "housewife": a zest for good food and wine, an appreciation of artistic and well-ordered surroundings, plus the knack of achieving these things thriftily and without being exclusively preoccupied by them. For an ambitious man she was certainly the ideal wife.

In pursuance of his intention to educate the "million" pleasantly, Benjamin inaugurated his reign at the Grecian on Easter Monday, March 31, with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The first night's performance was introduced by the proprietor himself in a Prologue, wittily written by E. L. Blanchard. As he stepped forward to recite the lines he must have remembered—perhaps with a rather wistful amusement—the eager young man who had welcomed an audience to his "house-warming" twenty years before.

*New undertakings, old examples teach,  
Should have a prologue in an opening speech,  
A few smart lines in rhyming diction dressed,  
Wherein all future projects are expressed.  
A less ambitious purpose brings me here,  
I come to give a welcome most sincere.  
If you expect this brief address explains  
Why I again hold managerial reins,  
Be this my answer—that I wished to see  
Again the stage that yet had charms for me,  
To greet an audience as I welcome you,  
And meet with old friends while encountering new.  
Within these walls, supporters of a house  
Where many a brick has echoed "Bravo Rouse!"  
I well might think my present project bold,  
To take the place he filled so well of old;  
But all he did, and ably did before,  
Shall spur me onward to accomplish more.*

## “CONQUEST OF THE EAGLE”

Having delivered this simple and unaffected welcome, he alluded to the new status of the Grecian as a theatre, which meant that, under the licensing laws, liquor could no longer be sold in the auditorium:

*The talents of all nations shall be shown,  
Especially the talents of our own;  
All that is British you shall here find handy,  
Excepting one thing British—that is Brandy.*

He next launched into some elaborate puns, referring to the glass walls of the Crystal Palace (then a great novelty):

*Shakespeare has told us of the drama's feature,  
To hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to Nature;  
While such reflections here before you pass,  
You see your drama and you have your glass:  
Both which I promise, with some conscious pride,  
Shall be the best that London can provide.  
This year all hope to better their condition,  
And THIS is my Industrial Exhibition.  
Although no glass this lofty roof contains,  
Who looks for pleasure will not care for Pains.  
May crowds attend each night as we progress,  
My 'pinions being the 'pinions of the Press.  
And while I trust your pleasure to increase,  
Hope, after CONQUEST, you will like a PIECE!*

The “piece,” as we have said, was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, produced in operatic style. Mr. Graham, from Sadler's Wells, played Theseus; Miss Julia Harland—retained from Rouse's opera company—was Oberon; Miss Harriet Gordon, Titania; and Amilie Conquest made her first stage appearance as Puck. An engraving has preserved for us the handsome features of the buxom Oberon, beside whom twelve-year-old Amilie looks the merest child. The determined little Puck is like a dark-haired Alice in Wonderland in her knee-length crinoline. A solemn child, with that air of responsibility which befits the eldest girl of a large family, she is chiefly remarkable for the exquisite hands which she inherited from her mother.

There followed a farce, *The Young Widow*, in which Benjamin gave a spirited rendering of “Splash,” his acting, singing and dancing being greeted with shouts of applause. This is the only recorded instance of his dancing, and it shows that his forty-five years still sat lightly on him.

## THE GRECIAN

Lastly came the ballet *Flora and Zephyr*, arranged by Clarissa, which introduced her children Laura and Isabella—the latter only six years old. The critics gave it high praise, both for its choreography and for its beautiful costumes. Originally introduced into England by its composer Didelot in 1798, this is the first “flying ballet,” in which the dancers are lifted by wires: evidently the Conquests, later the main exponents of this *genre*, were already interested in it.

The Conquests had reason to be satisfied with their initial reception. It is true that, as in Rouse’s time, the theatre itself ran at a loss; but Benjamin concentrated on adding to the attractions of the gardens. By Whitsun he had built a “monstre” (*sic*) dancing platform, and on May 25 he launched out into a Bal Masqué—the first ever held in the East End—with festoons of variegated lamps, an orchestra, and six Masters of Ceremonies “en grande tenue.” (Was it the influence of George, on holiday from Boulogne, which led to this lavish use of French in the advertisements?) A champagne supper was served for 150 guests, after which dancing continued until dawn.

The piece announced for the following week was: *Memoirs of the D — — —*. Certainly, the Grecian was going gay.

At Christmas came the great event of the year—the Pantomime, with which the name of Conquest was to be associated for the next fifty years. This first Grecian pantomime was eagerly anticipated, as Benjamin had already attracted notice by his spectacles at the Garrick.

“Boxing night was indeed a Saturnian event at the Eagle,” comments *The Era*, “the portals to every part of the theatre being crowded at an early hour with holiday folk of all grades, eager to be present on the production of Mr. Conquest’s first ‘comic annual’ at his new house.”

The somewhat involved title was *Queen Mab, or Harlequin the Magic Pippin, and the Peri of the Pearly Lake*, by C. A. Somerset. Clarissa’s hand is discernible in the scenario, which reads more like a *ballet d’action* than a pantomime:

“On the rising of the curtain, the Abode of Fame is discovered, and on the invocation of the Good Genii of the Elements, a grand moving diorama is introduced, representing Earth, Air, Fire and Water, with all their attributes. The next scene represents Elfin

## “CONQUEST OF THE EAGLE”

Castle in the distance, with the Queen and her Fairy Train in full speed; afterwards the courtyard; and subsequently the Hall of Audience in Queen Mab's Castle, where a grand Fairy Ballet is performed, introducing a new minuet and gavotte, by Miss Laura Conquest and Miss Isabella Conquest. The scene changes to the Crystal Palace of Queen Mab, being converted into a water garden through the magic influence of the Peri of the Pearly Lake, who appears from a great water-lily (Victoria Regina), and the pantomimical transformation takes place.”

The actors were T. Ridgway, one of the best Clowns of his time; J. W. Collier as Harlequin and his wife (Mlle. Luiza) as Harlequina, with the veteran Grammani as Pantaloon.

Just as in Rouse's time the accent had been upon opera, it was now upon dancing. Benjamin's laudable ambition to elevate the East End had to be modified. During his first years at the Grecian the programmes followed a set pattern: first a play—occasionally melodrama but more often burletta or burlesque—then a farce, and finally a ballet. At the end of all this, those who were still unsatiated could listen to an *al fresco* concert. Tickets, including refreshments, cost 1s. (ladies and children, 6d.).

“Mrs. Conquest's Dancing School” advertised regularly in *The Era*, on lines which suggest a select Victorian seminary:

“Young ladies between the ages of 12 and 15 wishing to make stage dancing their profession can be taught the art without premium. Application to be made by the parents personally at the Eagle Tavern, City Road, before 12 o'clock daily, to Mr. C. Montgomery, Acting Manager. Only a limited number required.”

By Whitsun 1853, the success of the theatre was so far established that Benjamin's old friend Charles Sloman (who later became his Concert Director) was able to entitle a fairy extravaganza *Conquest of the Eagle, or The Triumph of the Grecian*. This curious little piece relates how Troilus (the Grecian) thwarts a conspiracy by the Birds of Prey, headed by Eagle's Beak, to carry off the Princess Sacharissa, daughter of King Connobler, and by the help of the Fairy Philomela wins her for his bride. This subject gave scope for striking costumes and scenery, and it was highly praised for both. Particularly effective was the scene in a “gloomy cavern” where the birds—Eagle's Beak, Cormorant, Raven, Vulture, Kite, Crow, Falcon, Parrot, Owl (from *Der Freischütz*, we are told in the cast

## THE GRECIAN

list) and Irish Owl (evidently a comic character)—danced round a witches' cauldron, in a parody of *Macbeth*. In contrast were some bright harvest dances by a chorus of Peasants, and the climax in the Palace of Perpetual Motion in the Kingdom of Nightingalia, where Philomela on a throne of roses united the lovers. The Epilogue, spoken by Troilus, pointed a neat moral:

*And now, kind friends, for you it doth remain  
Our Eagle here to come and see again;  
Your Grecian likewise will put forth a claim:  
Grant us your favour, let us rise in fame.  
And still we trust, to aid our Eagle's flight,  
You'll come and view our Conquest every night.*

This play was only one of a number of attractions for the Whitsuntide gala. There was also *Faust*, a concert in the grounds, a balloon ascent by Henry Coxwell, with the acrobats H. and E. Buislay suspended on a double trapeze from the car; and a spectacular tightrope walk by Josephine Elsler, who traversed the 400-foot length of the garden at a height of sixty feet.

The Crimean War, breaking out in the spring of 1854, did not affect the theatre. Business continued good, so that Benjamin was able to redecorate the Grecian during the Lenten recess. It reopened at Easter in a splendour of white and gold cornices, supporting festoons of crimson velvet with triple-gilt borders. The first play was *Olympic Revels*, with Harriet Coveney in Madame Vestris' celebrated rôle of Pandora, supported by the now famous *corps de ballet*, of which it was said: "We doubt whether it can be equalled, or even approached, by any similar establishment in the metropolis."

During the whole summer of 1854 an outstanding attraction was an acrobatic feat by Signor Faranelli, who made a "terrific descent" head foremost from the highest tower of the castle, surrounded by fireworks.

Several classical plays were given in the autumn, among them: *The School for Scandal*, and *The Hypocrite*. There was also a revival of Clarissa's ballet *L'Union des Nations*, which had run for several weeks the previous winter.

The spring of 1855 was marked by another grand fête and gala, in honour of the visit to Queen Victoria of Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie. With their French connections, the family at the Grecian were well placed to make a success of these celebrations. Seventeen-year-old George rose to the occasion with a drama

## “CONQUEST OF THE EAGLE”

entitled *Geneviève, or the Lost Wife*, adapted from the French, which was hailed as a success. This may have been more than mere politeness to a very young dramatist, for the author himself thought it worth reviving in 1872. George was still studying at the time and not yet working actively in the theatre, but this play, and a still earlier effort—*A Woman's Secret, or Richelieu's Wager* (1853)—mark the beginning of an output that ceased only with his death, nearly half a century later.

It was during 1855 that Benjamin gave a helping hand to his step-daughter's husband Charles Dillon. The whole complicated story may be read in the Memoirs of that spirited old gossip, John Coleman—who has contrived to write a two-volume autobiography without a single date . . . not even that of his own birth! Disentangling the sequence of events with the aid of notices in *The Era*, they appear to run as follows: From the end of 1850 to the spring of 1851, Dillon had a lease of the Theatre Royal, Sheffield, and frequently acted also at the Queen's Theatre, Manchester. Through 1854 to the summer of 1855, Coleman was lessee of the Sheffield theatre, but Dillon succeeded him on October 21, 1855. Meanwhile, a new theatre, the Adelphi, had been opened at Sheffield and Coleman was in the market for it. But a disappointment was in store for him. A friend came to him with the news: “Dillon was here last night with his father-in-law, old Conquest of the Grecian, bragging that they've secured the new theatre at Sheffield, and that you've got the kick-out.”

“Smith had been rightly informed,” continues Coleman ruefully, “Dillon had secured the new theatre and I was left in the cold.”

By this *coup* they had cornered all the straight drama in Sheffield. At the Theatre Royal Dillon was giving an ambitious repertory, which included *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Belphegor* (his star part), *Louis XI*, *William Tell*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Stranger* (a domestic drama from the German, in which Mrs. Siddons, long years before, had scored heavily as the “woman with a past,” Mrs. Haller) and *Esmeralda* (from Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame de Paris*) with Clara as the gipsy heroine. The Adelphi was leased for two months from December 2, 1855—presumably for a pantomime, as the Clown Flexmore was engaged.

Having settled his son-in-law's affairs, Benjamin (alas! now labelled “old” Conquest of the Grecian, though he was still only fifty) gave his own son a try-out in the pantomime *Harlequin Sun*

*and Moon, or The Seven Sisters of the Zodiac in an Uproar*. It can only have been a very minor part, since George passed unnoticed, and he himself reckoned that his real pantomime début was in *Peter Wilkins*, two years later. His first straight part—except for the silent children at the Garrick—was the Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist* (September 3, 1855).

Coleman recounts with pardonable satisfaction that Dillon's season at Sheffield terminated with a heavy loss, but the papers say nothing of this. Dillon left in March 1856, after the presentation of a gold watch, with appropriate speeches. When a season has been really disastrous, no one connected with the theatre has any money to buy watches, or any desire to compliment the Manager—who is more likely to slip away unannounced than to make a ceremony of his departure.

In any case, it was only three weeks later that *The Times* critic, John Oxenford, seeing Dillon's Belphegor at Sadler's Wells, wrote the article that "made" him overnight.

Benjamin acted quickly. Within a day or two, he had applied for a three-year lease of the Lyceum. It had struck him that this colourful vagrant of a son-in-law, hitherto a liability, might become an asset to the family. And now an amusing situation developed. Here is the story as preserved in *The Times*:

*Saturday, May 24, 1856. (Theatre Advertisement Notice.)*

LYCEUM: THEATRE ROYAL. Mr. Charles Dillon respectfully informs the nobility, gentry and public generally that he has become the lessee of the above elegant establishment, which will open under his management early in September next.

*Monday, May 26th.*

Sir: My attention has been called to an advertisement in your impression of today from Mr. Dillon, informing the public that he has taken the Lyceum Theatre. This is entirely false. Mr. Dillon applied to my secretary a month since, to know if the theatre was then to let, and was informed that it was let to Mr. Conquest of the Grecian Theatre, for three years. What motive Mr. Dillon can have in issuing such an advertisement, I am at a loss to conceive. I hope you will be kind enough to give this publicity.

I am, Sir, Your Obedient Servant,  
A. Walter Arnold.

31, Golden Square,  
May 24th.

“CONQUEST OF THE EAGLE”

*Tuesday, May 27th.*

Sir: In answer to a letter, which I have every reason to believe is a forgery, published in your journal today, I beg leave to say the lease of the Lyceum Theatre is drawn up in the names of A. Walter Arnold, on the one part, lessor, and Charles Dillon on the other, lessee. Mr. Johnson, Chancery Lane, is the solicitor on behalf of Mr. Arnold, Messrs. Guillaume and Tanqueray, of Old Broad Street, are solicitors on my part. The insertion of these facts will confer a favour.

Your most obedient Servant,  
Charles Dillon.

Eagle Tavern,  
May 26th.

The basis of the misunderstanding is obvious. Benjamin, knowing that an application from a manager of his standing would be more favourably considered than one from a struggling provincial actor, had applied for the lease direct, with no mention of Charles Dillon. But several tantalising questions arise. Granting that the solicitors had handled all correspondence and drawn up the lease, how had Mr. Arnold signed it without realising the name of the actual lessee? Even supposing him capable of this absentmindedness, how was it that the name “Dillon” did not reveal to him in a flash why Conquest wanted a second theatre? Had he been ignorant of their relationship, his solicitors could surely have told him.

Another interesting point, in the light of future events, is that Dillon was staying at the Eagle—obviously on the best of terms with his hosts. About this time George painted him as Belphegor—a picture now owned by Mrs. Arthur Conquest. This is remarkable work for so young a man, suggesting that if George had not had other outlets for his talents, he might have become famous as a portrait painter. The little girl in the picture, representing Belphegor’s son Henri, is Marie Wilton, afterwards Lady Bancroft.

The pantomime at the Grecian that year (1856) was *Harlequin Crib, King of Clubs*—“another of those pleasing fairy sketches, which the taste of Mrs. Conquest in the arrangement of the ballets has made so attractive.” Its chief claim to a mention is that the Columbine was Miss Elizabeth Osmond. Miss Osmond was one of Clarissa’s most promising pupils—very young and strikingly handsome. She had excellent notices, and we hope she treasured them, for before the next pantomime came round, she had more domestic interests to occupy her mind.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The Nijinsky of Pantomime*

E. L. BLANCHARD'S diary for July 13, 1857, has an entry of which the significance is clearer to us, a century later, than to the writer :

"At night to Grecian; chat with Conquest and his son, who—author, actor, artist,—shows talent."

What Blanchard was, in fact, witnessing, was not merely a proud father showing off his twenty-year-old son, but the beginning of a new era at the Grecian.

Benjamin and Clarissa were reaping the benefit of their wisdom and self-sacrifice in denying themselves George's services during his adolescence. In those days a theatre-born child was pitched onto the boards as soon as he could walk, and kept there for the rest of his life; when he could read well enough to spell out his lines he thought his schooling complete. The Astleys and Ducrow in particular were notoriously illiterate. Ducrow is the source of the catch-phrase "Cut the cackle and come to the 'osses!"—his advice to two tragedians who were holding up one of his equestrian spectacles by Homeric diatribes before a battle.

In contrast, George Conquest, after four years in France and a course at the Royal Academy, came back with a wide Continental culture, bi-lingual, equipped with a library of French plays, and able to design stage sets and properties. He was, too, an excellent business man—far more practical than his father. From 1857 onwards he began to pull his weight, and it was due to him that the pantomimes at the Grecian, and later at the Surrey, ranked among the best in London.

It is not our purpose to describe the development of Pantomime in England; nor is there any need, as the subject has been covered by A. E. Wilson (of *The Star*) in three delightful books, "Christmas Pantomime,"<sup>1</sup> "Pantomime Pageant,"<sup>2</sup> and "The Story of Pantomime."<sup>3</sup> (The two former are in a way the parents of this work, for it was Mr. Wilson who aroused the writer's interest in the Conquests.)

<sup>1</sup> Allen & Unwin (1934).    <sup>2</sup> Stanley Paul (1946).    <sup>3</sup> Home and Van Thal (1949).





## THE NIJINSKY OF PANTOMIME

Briefly, Pantomime was introduced into England by Rich, of Covent Garden. In 1717, at Lincoln's Inn Fields, he produced *Harlequin Sorcerer*—a story from Ovid's "Metamorphoses," with an interwoven comic fable and a transformation scene. For many years the "opening," or theme, was brief and sketchy, while the ensuing Harlequinade might last two hours. Gradually the proportions were reversed. At first the hero was Harlequin, but Joe Grimaldi's popularity built up the Clown.

Conquest pantomimes fall into three clearly-defined groups: from 1851 to 1856, when the predominant influence was Clarissa, with her winsome pupils; from 1857 to 1879, when they became a vehicle for startling acrobatics by George Conquest; and finally from 1881 onwards at the Surrey, after George had been grounded by age and accident and the fantastic themes of the Grecian pantomimes had been replaced by fairy-tale subjects, full of knock-about comedy and well though not extravagantly mounted. These groups might be summarised, respectively, as: the *pretty*, the *bizarre* and the *joyful*. Judging by the titles alone, one would be tempted to apply the term *macabre* to the second group; but that would give too sombre an impression to do justice to the fun and the punning, the gay good humour and animal high spirits that enlivened them. Victorian children, however, must have had sound nerves, if they really enjoyed being confronted by the Flying Dutchman, Herne the Hunter, the Demon Dwarf, the Spider Crab, Grim Goblin, the Rock Fiend, and other supernatural creations of George Conquest's fertile brain.

George first attracted attention at Easter, 1857, when he played Hasserac in a burlesque called *The Forty Thieves*, but his real success came in the Christmas pantomime of the same year, *Peter Wilkins and the Flying Indians*. In this skit on a popular drama of the same title, a character called the Nondescript was gayed as "Pastrano Nonsuch," and played by George as "a burlesque copy of the bearded Julia, whose (h)airs and graces created some curiosity a short time since in Regent Street."

An opening scene in the World of Storms gave place to the Palace of the King of the Flying Indians—an opportunity for "Mrs. Conquest's Pupils" to display themselves in a flying ballet representing an Indian fête.

The year was that of the Indian Mutiny, and this colours the puns and comic business. It is pointed out that the Flying Indians are *not* the retreating Sepoys; while the Indian rebel, Nana Sahib, caught under an extinguisher, is "out of *Luck-now*." A further

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stream of puns, anticipating the fantastic "books" of the Surrey pantomimes, is based on flying: the Prime Ministers *plume* themselves on being rather *downy*; the young ladies go out on a *fly* and think it is rather a *lark*. (And so do we!)

The transformation scene again stressed the Indian motif. This is how *The Era* describes it:

"At the back appears the dome of an Indian Mosque, of network richly gilt. Two platforms slope from about two-thirds the length of the stage towards the centre; along these are ranged richly-jewelled shields, surmounted by quivers filled with arrows, the fletches of which are gilt and drooping with gems. These gradually open and discover upon each side seven ladies in gorgeous golden tissue robes, apparently hanging from gauzy golden clouds; and beneath them sixteen children, similarly dressed, as if in the act of rising, each bearing a cornucopia filled with flowers. At the extreme of the stage rises a golden pavilion, and in it the King of the Flying Indians; and at this, the crowning point of the tableau, a full light is thrown, without the aid of coloured fires—a most judicious departure from the usual custom."

*Harlequin Guy Faux*, produced in 1858, was written by George Conquest and Henry Spry, initiating a partnership that was only broken by George's death in 1901. George played Guy Faux and Harriet Coveney was the Amazon Queen. As for Amilie, in the character of a nurse in King James I's household, the programme suggests that she contributed a scene of high-spirited comedy: her part is described as follows:

"Alice, the royal nurserymaid—made to be the rocker of the royal cradles—quite up to her own good looks, rather fond of her glass, and by the administration of the pap teaches the infants the pleasures of the bowl, and though hand and glove with children thinks two kids upon her hands at once too many; therefore gives herself the sack, packs up her bags, and boxes, James's ears, and takes up her trunk."

(The original is peppered with italics, calling attention to the somewhat childish string of puns.)

The next pantomime, *Valentine and Orson*, had George Lupino for its clown.

It was in 1860, in *The Blue Bird of Paradise*, that George first developed to the full that mixture of acrobatics and character-

## THE NIJINSKY OF PANTOMIME

acting which made him famous. He played Prince Pigmy—a deformed dwarf, who:

“... danced, fought combats, jumped through traps, ascended some steep scenery, and took an aerial flight with the greatest of ease. He only wore a partial mask, which allowed his features to give every expression required, and the manner in which he portrayed the varied passions of disappointment, rage and sarcastic anger raised a feeling of regret, with those who could appreciate so masterly a performance, that it should be expended in a production where scenery and the painted face of the Clown is all that is looked for.”

Here we have a transition between the “Big-Heads” worn by the characters in the opening of early nineteenth-century pantomimes (under which they were made up for the Harlequinade, and which they discarded when it began), and ordinary grease-paint make-up.

Another note of progress is sounded in 1861, when describing the transformation scene of *The Fair One with the Locks of Gold*:

“On stage were movable beds of flowers, bordered with cut-glass drops and lit from the inside with gas, and the whole is lit with electric light.”

George's acrobatics gained an even more enthusiastic notice in *The Spider and the Fly* (1862).

“The extraordinary performance of Mr. George Conquest as Number Nip in the pantomime *The Spider and the Fly* has crowded the theatre since Christmas. As a pantomimist, Mr. Conquest must take rank with the highest in his line, and his rapid movements in the ‘Phantom Fight,’ where he is here, there and everywhere at the same time, would have driven playgoers of a hundred years ago out of their wits. The wonderful agility he displays in ascending and descending the traps on the stage, together with his clever singing and dancing, proves him to be a well-trained artiste in a physical as well as a theatrical point of view, and it is hardly necessary to say that he now and again comes in for a hearty round of applause.

“He is not the only one, however, for Miss Laura Conquest, as Sunflower, is as graceful and fairy-like as could well be imagined, and the ‘poetry of motion’ could not possibly have a better illustration, or one more eagerly appreciated.”

The career of the Conquest girls was short. Amilie by this time was married and living in the North; Laura and Isabella appeared in pantomime in the early 1860's, but by 1866 they too had gone.

In compensation, a new family was growing up. As early as 1863, George's little son was put on the boards as the Dog in *Robinson Crusoe*.

\*

Of *The Devil on Two Sticks* (1866) Blanchard notes that it had "Vampire and 28 Traps." These—called "Star Traps" from their shape—were a device by which a performer could be shot up to the stage with an impetus that threw him high into the air, enabling him to make from one to three pirouettes—according to his skill—before alighting. (Only George himself, his son Arthur, and one or two of the Lupinos, have ever achieved the triple pirouette.) The trap was worked by a pulley, with four men on the ropes below the stage, and it was tricky. If the pull was imperfectly timed the trap would rise unevenly, throwing the acrobat off balance, so that he struck the stage-floor. Many painful accidents were caused in this way; bruises and abrasions were common, and occasionally a man would have to go through his act with a broken nose or a skinned thigh.

*Harlequin Rik-Rak*, in 1867—an adaptation of the Frankenstein story—was another triumph for George Conquest. *The Times* described him as:

"... one of the most remarkable artists of the day, combining the qualities of actor and acrobat to a degree which could not easily be found elsewhere. He can tumble, jump, execute feats on the trapeze and walk on stilts to perfection, at the same time allowing histrionic feeling to shine through all his athletic exploits.

"As the principal character in the new Pantomime he first appears as a Colossus not to be represented without the most consummate proficiency in walking upon some support that raises the feet high above the ground, and wearing an enormous head that begins where the natural skull leaves off.

"Superior powers force this gigantic gnome to become first a human turnip, afterwards a monkey. To assume the former character he is compelled to throw aside the gigantic appurtenances and to cram himself into a spherical covering of small diameter—in which contracted position he dances as light as a fay."

This is the first of a series of non-human characters in which George took a delight. Had the Twenty Questions team existed in those days, and had they been asked to identify something "animal, vegetable or mineral—or all three at a time," that psychic guesser Jack Train would have scored a "birdie" with "George Conquest!"

## THE NIJINSKY OF PANTOMIME

*The Flying Dutchman* (1869) brought George the younger into notice as an acrobat: "Eleven years old and very promising," notes Blanchard. The boy again attracted favourable attention in the 1870 pantomime, *Herne the Hunter*. This was honoured by a visit from *Punch*, whose reviewer—allowing for humorous exaggeration—gives an excellent account of a "phantom fight" and the audience's reaction to it.

After describing at some length how, on his cabby's advice, he used a private entrance (through the Eagle bar) to avoid the crowd milling round the main doors, and how the opening scenes of the pantomime passed half-heard amid a great deal of noise, he continues:

"Here follows a duet by two fairies which commands silence at once and is very well sung. (N.B. all the singing is quite equal to anything in the West End pantomimes.) Ballet of Mrs. CONQUEST's pupils very pretty. Entrance of HENRY VIII<sup>1</sup>. Vociferous applause. Entrance of CARDINAL WOLSEY on horseback. Then WILL SOMERS.

*Henry* (to WOLSEY): No larks, or I'll smash yer. (Roars of delight.

HENRY whacks everybody. Master CONQUEST, Jr., as a Monkey, capital.)

*Henry* (to ANNE BOLEYN): I love yer so much I must smash yer. (Roars of delight.)

*Voices of the Night*: Set down there!

*Other Voices*: Set down! Order, order!

*The Polite Person*: Order, please!

*Female Voice* (imploringly): Why don't yer set down?

*Will Somers* (to WOLSEY): Who's yer hatter?

*Henry* (to MABEL LYNDWOOD): I love yer. Come 'ere or I'll smash yer.

*Wolsey* (keeping up his moral and ecclesiastical character): O, naughty, naughty!

Appearance of HERNE (Mr. CONQUEST). Enormous applause. He flies down in fireworks. Wonderful make-up. Row in pit consequent upon someone refusing to 'set down.'

*Voices* (in gallery): Set down!

*Other Voices*: Set down, will yer?

*Voices* (in Pit): Set down! Come out, will yer?

This request is evidently refused. Pit rises *en masse*. Row and disturbance.

*Mr. George Conquest* (as HERNE, addressing his audience sensibly): Now keep your seats, or you'll lose them.

<sup>1</sup> G. H. ("Jingo") Macdermott.

## THE GRECIAN

People all at once sit down again. End of row. Grand combat scene. HERNE pursued by HENRY and WOLSEY.

*Herne*: Ha, ha! (appears in centre).

*Henry*: I'll smash yer! (Hits at HERNE, who immediately disappears, reappearing at once on the left.)

*Wolsey*: O, naughty, naughty! (Hits at HERNE and falls. HERNE disappears and reappears, springing up about half the height of the stage, from a trap on the right.)

*Henry* (after him again): I'll smash yer! (Falls foul of the Cardinal.)

*Herne* (reappearing on a trapeze at the top of the stage): Ha, ha! (Swings across and flies down on the right.)

*Wolsey* (feebly): O, naughty, naughty! (HENRY whacks him.)

*Herne* (astonishing them all by suddenly starting up on an anvil): Ha, ha!

They hit at him, he takes a header through a small trap in the stage, just large enough to admit his shoulders, and disappears. Immense applause. The MONKEY now joins in the scrimmage.

*Henry* (at intervals): I'll smash yer!

*Wolsey* (when he isn't falling down or being whacked): O, naughty, naughty!

"HERNE pops up one trap and down another every other second. The stage appears honeycombed with traps. Bang! whack! smash! Appearance and disappearance of HERNE in all sorts of unexpected places. MONKEY after WOLSEY, HENRY after HERNE. All exhausted. Fireworks. End of scene. Vociferous cheering. HERNE and talented assistants bow their acknowledgments.

"The pantomime goes on, but the Great Scene being now over, we leave, feeling well repaid for our Nicht wi' CONQUEST at the Grecian.

"Red Fire. Curtain (after we've gone)." <sup>1</sup>

George's daughter Lizzie appeared in this pantomime as "Little Queen Mab." By 1872 two more Conquests had been added to the troupe: thirteen-year-old Lizzie as a Forest Fairy had her little sisters, Ada and Laura, in attendance. The pantomime—a burlesque on *Der Freischütz*—bore the engaging title: *Nix, the Demon Dwarf, or Harlequin the Seven Charmed Bullets, the Fairy, the Fiend, and the Will-o'-the-Wisp*. It described the adventures of a young marksman lured into the clutches of the Demon Hunter, and in its mechanical and scenic effects George Conquest surpassed himself. For years afterwards his helpers talked proudly of "Old Nix's Head"—

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced by kind permission of the proprietors of *Punch*.

### THE NIJINSKY OF PANTOMIME

which appeared to float across the stage on its whiskers. This was a property made by George himself. It had cost him nine months' work, but he thought so little of it that he would not even allow it to be tried out until persuaded by Henry Spry. The sequel is amusingly related in an "interview" with the Head itself, published many years later in the *Black and White Budget*, when Old Nix was brought out again for the *Miss Muffit* pantomime at the Surrey theatre:

"I remember one day" (says Old Nix) "the guv'nor was more than usually depressed and Spry more than ever hopeful. I was placed at the front of the stage, and Spry and the guv'nor went down in the stalls to get a good view. Presently Spry said: 'George, he'll do!' And the guv'nor for the first time beamed on me, and replied, 'By Jove, I think you're right!' Then, when they saw how I could roll my eyes, put out my tongue, and make rude faces, they were delighted."

Asked if he were related to the "dolly pals" who "fake away" in Gay's famous song, Nix replied:

"Nothing of the sort! You ought to know 'Nix' means nothing. I'm next to nothing compared with ordinary individuals: no arms, no legs, no body, but—such a head. Phew!"

From this article we learn that Barnum subsequently offered £200 for the Head, but Conquest refused to part with it. The original idea sprang from the pen of an artist who signed himself "Crowquill."

The accompanying photographs suggest that its features were made in some kind of rubber or plastic compound, and that its highly mobile expressions were worked by the actor from within.

In this guise George made his first appearance, as the dwarfish henchman of the Demon Hunter, helping him to ensnare the young lover. Then, struck by a stray bullet in the shooting-match scene, he was mechanically released from the enveloping head, and sprang forth as a sprightly and still more mischievous fiend:

"... now fighting a phantom combat, where at every stroke of his opponent's sword he disappears into the bowels of the earth—now flying through a trap and alighting upon some frail support in mid-air—now leaping from a tall rock or terrible precipice upon his foe—now transforming at a word a brilliant saloon to a magical

forest, where fairy forms are couched under every tree, where rippling glades gleam in the silvery moonlight, and all that is beautiful and fairylike tempts the innocent lovers to wander in its deceitful bowers.

"The Transformation Scene is of unequalled beauty, change after change revealing to the delighted audience new features of form and colour, and becoming elaborated into one gorgeous blaze of bewildering splendour, in which all the resources of the scene-painter, the carpenter, the mechanist and composer, with the entire array of pretty faces and figures, presided over by Mrs. Conquest, are called into requisition, and the enchanted audience shout until they are hoarse."

(The "Mrs. Conquest" mentioned is George's wife Elizabeth, who, with her brother William Ozmond,<sup>1</sup> was carrying on the dancing-school in the intervals of producing a flourishing quiverful of Conquests.)

Continuing its description, *The Era* mentions a scene called the Skeletons' Haunt, with a self-acting Skeleton:

". . . who does the drollest things imaginable, administering a right-hander with his bony fist, bestowing a kick upon Royalty with his fleshless foot, opening and shutting his cavernous mouth, and smoking a cigar besides. In this scene there are skeletons of strange beasts, birds and fishes, such as Noah might have been familiar with before the Deluge.

"Another (!) pretty effect is the Enchanted Wood, a charming rustic landscape, painted upon a transparent canvas, illuminated from behind the scene, and a series of dissolving views are thrown on it from time to time."

This scene was so much to the taste of the gallery that they encored it—a pointer showing the relative importance of scenery and acting in those pre-cinematic days. It was not unusual for the show to be stopped while the designer and the stage-manager "took a bow" for some particularly striking effect.

A theatre that produced its own pantomimes was, like a modern film studio, a self-supporting community, giving direct employment to dozens of people and indirect employment to hundreds. G. A. Sala, in his "*Gaslight and Daylight*" (1859), vividly depicts the back-stage activities preceding a pantomime. He does not specify the theatre, but it is almost certainly the Grecian.

<sup>1</sup> He spelt his name both "Osmond" and "Ozmond," with a preference for the latter.

## THE NIJINSKY OF PANTOMIME

While rehearsals by the light of one dim gas-jet take up the stage, the rooms behind, above and below it are swarming with carpenters, scene-painters, property men and seamstresses, all as busy as they can be. Scene-painting is done by means of *pouncing*, i.e. outlining the design by dusting powdered charcoal through pricked holes. For the glittering "Fairy Palace" effects, foil paper and Dutch metal are glued on the canvas: the foundation for gilt is *mordant*—a mixture of Burgundy pitch, rosin, glue and beeswax, which fills the room with a pungent, aromatic scent. On the floor are huge pails of size and whitewash, into which colours ground on a workman's bench are stirred, until the desired shade is obtained.

In the property-room are banqueting tables with wooden fowls, brown-paper pies, goblets, and dishes of rich fruit, all nailed to the trestle-board. Hot food is served in bowls wreathed with cotton-wool and smoking with powdered lime. A curious tradition is that in the piece *No Song, No Supper*, the leg-of-mutton served up must be a real one—yet the cake accompanying it is wooden!

Every member of the property-master's family is pressed into service; even the smaller children sit around, painting spots on masks and making artificial flowers. In the same way, the wardrobe mistress and her family have turned out the vast stock of costumes from earlier pantomimes. They patch, and piece, and combine the old dresses, and stitch busily at new ones.

There is no Christmas dinner for anyone connected with the pantomime. All through Christmas Day and far into the night the rehearsals and back-stage preparations go on, ready for the opening on Boxing Day. (The Grecian did occasionally open on Christmas Eve, but this performance was looked on as a public dress-rehearsal; and if the effects miscarried or there was an interminable wait while scenery was being adjusted, audience and critics took it in good part.)

In 1873 George Conquest performed the amazing feat of producing and acting in two pantomimes at once—Blanchard's *Puss in Boots* at the Crystal Palace, and his own *Wood Demon* at the Grecian. In the former his son played the title rôle, while he himself—according to Blanchard—became in turn: "Demon Dolorous; an Ogre, old Gobble-'em-up; the Imp of Mischief; and finally a Giant, from which he sank into a Dwarf, insignificant in size."

## THE GRECIAN

Some of these parts he repeated in *The Wood Demon*, adding the representation of a tree: "a blighted, lightning-stricken, withered old trunk, with branches waving weirdly above his head and doing duty for arms." After an incantation the trunk opens:

"... and out steps a giant of most portentous size—an ogre so real that the babes in the pit begin to cry. By a wonderful compression, the giant is changed into a little dwarf, as broad as he is long. Next he becomes an animated pear, and then—hey presto!—a vivid green version of the Brighton Octopus is dancing about the stage; and with this the first part of Mr. Conquest's performance may be said to have ended."

But George, after starting at three o'clock at the Crystal Palace, still had plenty of energy in hand. In the second half he gave "the more agile and gymnastic part of his impersonation," going through so many evolutions that the watching critic felt dizzy and out of breath.

On the first night the performance was interrupted by the comedian, Arthur Williams, falling in a dead faint on the stage—he had been playing with his hand badly injured in an explosion of some detonating powder, and the pain was too much for him. After a breathing-space he recovered and went on with his part.

\*

By this time the Grecian pantomimes were the talk of London. Each year people would ask: "Whatever will George Conquest do next?" He was now well launched into the animal kingdom, and in 1874 his fantasy produced *Snip, Snap, Snorum*—the first being a bird, the second a monkey, and the third an oyster—all, of course, played by George himself.

Brighton Aquarium must have held a special attraction for him, for next year he followed up his Oyster with *Spitz-Spitze the Spider Crab, or the Sprite of Spitzbergen*. The stage represented an aquarium, and George was a crab so large that his claws extended from one side of it to the other, with dark spots on the carapace that gradually transformed themselves into flaming eyes. "Weird, grotesque, original and eccentric as it is, there is yet a strange fascination, and while it is on the stage we cannot take our eyes off it." George turned successively into a hermit, an executioner, a conjuror, a dwarf, and "a tiny little mannikin, more resembling a marionette than anything human." Towards the end of the run, the secret of this apparition was revealed: it was, in fact, a puppet, with a life-like head of George Conquest fitted to the body of a five-year-old

child—the figure being mounted on a cabinet, inside which the real George manipulated it with strings.

As the persecuted heroine, Pauvrette, Lizzie Conquest won excellent notices. *The Era* praised her taste and intelligence, “very welcome in one so young” (she was barely seventeen). *Entr’acte* wrote: “Miss Lizzie Conquest looks pretty, acts nicely, sings sweetly, and dances neatly.” It seemed as though the Grecian had found its ideal principal girl. . . . No one could have foreseen that the snow which heralded the next pantomime would be falling on Lizzie’s grave.

Her father reacted, characteristically, by throwing himself fiercely into his work. *Grim Goblin* (1876) was perhaps his apogee. The advertisements invite us to:

“See George Conquest shot at an angle of forty-five degrees from the mouth of a Dragon onto a trapeze—the most wonderful gymnastic feat ever witnessed. . . . See George Conquest as the Octopus . . . the nearest approach to Nature, and a marvel of ingenuity. . . . See George Conquest as the Monkey—a most perfect study from nature.”

The story turns on the efforts made to recover the heart of Princess Pearl, carried off by the Goblin. The King and Prince Pert make the journey, but the Grim Goblin has carried the treasure to his stronghold, the Dragon’s Dell, where a wonderful phantom fight takes place:

“. . . introducing many entirely new features, and some of the most astounding leaps, dives and flights ever witnessed at the Grecian, where it appears as natural for the human form to be seen flying through the air or projected through the floor, as to assume the ordinary postures of mankind.

“Mr. George Conquest fully maintains his old supremacy. The Octopus not only looks like the real thing, but in its movements we trace an exact resemblance. The delicate and complicated machinery by which the ‘feelers’ of this monster move are exceedingly ingenious, and the most complete command of them is noticeable. Not alone as the Octopus, but as a gigantic Ape, Mr. George Conquest displays his extraordinary ability. The grotesque movements of the animal are so naturally, and at the same time so humorously assumed, that one might fancy Mr. Conquest had spent a greater portion of his life in studying monkey antics.”

## THE GRECIAN

In lighter vein, *Entr'acte*, under a line-sketch of the actor swinging on a trapeze, publishes its reactions in verse:

*Grim Goblin, the Octopus, Demon and Ape,  
Appears in the strangest conceivable shape,  
From no one knows where,  
First here and then there,  
Till no one would dare  
To assert or to swear  
That he hadn't the power to be everywhere. . . .*

*When he tumbles and dives,  
And in mid-air arrives,  
And seems to possess the cat's number of lives—  
When from opposite wings  
He easily swings,  
Into vacancy springs,  
And dances and sings,  
And does such a lot of remarkable things,  
That the audiences cry with astonishment filled—  
By Jove, it's a wonder the man isn't killed!*

In fact, he very nearly had been killed in the previous spring, when, not content with his exertions at the Grecian, he had produced and taken part in Blanchard's pantomime *The Yellow Dwarf*.

George himself tells the story, which is reproduced in his own handwriting in *The Era Almanack* of 1888. Answering a questionnaire: "What is the most striking incident of your professional career?" he writes:

"I think the most striking incident of my life took place in the Panto. which I produced at the Alexandra Palace, *The Yellow Dwarf*. One of the scenes was a Phantom Fight, in which I used to do the jumps of twenty and thirty feet.

"The jumps were accomplished by the means of indiarubber springs, and according to the height I wished to travel, so they were increased or decreased.

"The jumps were taken from different parts of the stage; for instance, one was from about seven feet *below* the stage, and another was from a raised rostrum about twelve feet *above* the level of the stage, so that actually the jump from below the stage was about 20 feet further to travel than the one from off the rostrum.

"When it came to rehearsal I tried the one jump from underneath the stage up to the border and it worked very well, so being very tired I did not think it requisite to try any of the others, but simply told the man in charge of the jumping machines to put the same

number of springs on each. *He did so*. When the performance came on the following afternoon, and I did the jump from the top of the 12-foot rostrum to the borders, in place of rising only to the height of the trapeze, on which I ought to have alighted, I found myself rising higher and higher past the gas battens, yet still I continued to rise. I knew there was a gridiron over my head, so I clutched at the ropes to check my ascent, but instead of its so doing it simply turned me feet upwards, and wrenched the ropes out of my hands. Still I continued to rise. At last my body took a different course and I was descending head first, and apparently no hopes of saving myself, but in my descent I fell with my chest across the trapeze. I immediately caught hold of the ropes. From the trapeze I used to dive off head first, about 25 feet. It was two or three minutes before I could recover my nerve to take the header."

Apparently this adventure passed unnoticed from the front of the house, for Blanchard makes no mention of it in his diary but merely records:

"1876, February 12th: To Alexandra Palace, see *The Yellow Dwarf*. George Conquest very clever, the story completely spoiled."

(The usual complaint of an author "edited" by the producer!)

Significant in the story quoted above is George's admission that he was "very tired"; it is the first sign that his iron constitution was beginning to flinch under the exertions he demanded from it. Not only physical feats, but also the practical business of managing the Grecian, translating and writing plays, modelling properties and planning effects—nothing theatrical seemed beyond the scope of his many-sided genius.

In *Roley-Poley, or Harlequin Magic Umbrella* (1877) George's first impersonation was a water-sprite imprisoned in a roly-poly pudding! He was then metamorphosed into a parrot, which has been graphically described in a paragraph quoted by A. E. Wilson ("Christmas Pantomime"):

"As a bird he was fearfully and wonderfully made, and he should be seen by all curious in ornithological matters. It yawns like a sluggard; talks like an orator; winks like, as an American would perhaps call, a knowing cuss; is no mean dancer; can roar as gently as any sucking dove; can hold his own as a vocalist in solo, duet, trio, or chorus. It is without doubt the most remarkable bird the world has yet seen, and as somebody remarked of the crane, 'It is neither fish, beast nor fowl, but a sad mixture of all

these things.' And more, George Conquest may be credited with no small ingenuity in hatching for us so extraordinary a specimen of the feathered tribe."

Of this pantomime the *Daily Telegraph* said:

"A Grecian pantomime must necessarily allow the Conquests to be all over the stage at once, to disappear and reappear at the most unexpected times and in the most unlooked-for places, to take desperate headers everywhere, to leap about overhead like flying squirrels, and generally set at defiance the laws of physics as applied to the human form divine."

One of the "flying squirrels" was George's second son, Fred, making his first appearance, at the age of seven, as a (very) Juvenile Policeman in the Harlequinade.

By this time the Grecian Pantomime had become as integral a part of Christmas as holly, mistletoe and plum-pudding: no one in the neighbourhood would have missed it, and many came from far afield. (It was reckoned that over 425,000 people saw *The Wood Demon*.) A warm, personal touch united audience and actors, if we are to believe *The Era*:

"The audiences, collected from the north and north-east of London, appear to treat Mr. Conquest's company as if it were a happy family, in which they have a direct and particular interest. They are at home at the Grecian. They call out 'Bravo, George!' in the same genuine and friendly spirit as they used to call 'Bravo, Rouse!' . . . and they are heartily delighted when each successive year brings out another clever member of the Conquest family on the very stage on which their talented father was educated, and in the theatre which was for so long a time the pride of their grandfather, Mr. Benjamin Conquest."

There must have been a general feeling of dismay and personal loss, when in the winter of 1878 George Conquest disposed of the lease of the Grecian and announced his farewell pantomime: *Hokee-Pokee, the Fiend of the Fungus Forest, or The Six Links of the Devil's Chain*. Its outstanding feature was a Porcupine, consisting (so the programme tells us) of 2,500 pieces, each with an individual movement, and all actuated by George as he raised and lowered his quills. Besides this he appeared as a demon, with glittering fans opening and shutting, and as a monstrous vampire bat with glaring eyes. (How did the "babes in the pit" react to these impersonations?)

*Hokee-Pokee* was not, in actual fact, the last pantomime produced

## THE NIJINSKY OF PANTOMIME

by the Conquests at the Grecian, for they returned to it in 1879 with *Harlequin Rokoko, the Rock Fiend*—the twenty-second pantomime in which Conquest and Spry had collaborated. Since this really was a farewell to the Grecian, and the last in the long series of “fantasy” pantomimes, we will quote an abridged version of *The Era*’s lengthy description :

“The first scene is Toadstool Valley, where King Toad reigns supreme. The young Prince Generous, in love with Princess Beauty and fearing rivals, carves a grotesque toad in the rock, which comes to life as Rokoko (played by George Conquest). When we first see Rokoko, he is crouching on the rock like a sculptured toad of gigantic size. It is difficult to believe that this hideous form can be human—it might be one of those monstrous toads of which naturalists tell us, shut up in some cavern far beneath the earth, or imprisoned in solid rock, until some convulsion sets them free. Mr. Conquest was made up to hide every trace of human form, and nothing could be more artistic than the manner in which, when the toad comes to life, the performer gradually shows, by fantastic movements and attitudes, the first indications of feeling, sensation and vitality. The monster toad shakes his enormous head gently, opens his monstrous glittering eyes, slowly puts forth his grotesque feet, and appears to give a spasmodic shudder, as if shaking off the sleep of centuries. With a clutch and a quiver, the strange creature crawls to the centre of the stage amid the deafening plaudits of the spectators. There is no common art, no common skill on the part of a performer who can produce such an effect as this.

“As the story unfolds, Rokoko, the slave of the Prince, falls in love with the Princess. To curb him, King Toad changes him into a turnip, but he still retains some power for harm. From Goblin Gorge, with its gloomy surroundings, the scene shifts to the King’s Palace—all columns and arches, fountains and statues. Rokoko turns it into a cucumber frame, and himself into a tree—a wild, withered, blasted tree, but still with some resemblance to a human form, for its leafless limbs move like arms and the roots serve as feet.

“The last great adventure of the Rock Fiend is in a Magic Valley, where there is a phantom fight, introducing new features even more remarkable than the former efforts of Mr. Conquest in that direction ; his son Mr. George Conquest, Jr., appears to have many of the gifts which have made his father famous. The Flying Fairy in this scene quite took the audience by surprise : it was the nearest approach to flying which we have seen.

“The Pantomime is modelled on the good old school—such as Joey Grimaldi would have witnessed approvingly.”

## THE GRECIAN

The curtain that fell on the last performance of *Rokoko* was, in fact, symbolic. Like all positive characters, George Conquest looked to the future rather than the past. He realised in time that the Grecian, as the last survivor of the old citizen tea-gardens, had become an anachronism, and had the courage to break away and seek his fortune elsewhere. But we of the new century, looking back at the glittering sequence of triumphs, faintly reflected through the eyes of those who witnessed them, cannot help regretting that no cinema existed to preserve them for our enjoyment. As Mr. Wilson says: "The Grecian pantomimes were the Conquests and the Conquests were the Grecian pantomimes." And the mainspring of their inspiration was George Conquest himself.



George Conquest in 1876

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Middle Years*

IN order to survey the Grecian pantomimes as a whole, we have let George Conquest outdistance his family in a flying leap through time. Now the trapeze has swung back again, and George, barely twenty, stands facing his father. A personable lad, not much taller than Benjamin but so perfectly proportioned that he does not look short. In spite of his French upbringing he stands out as typically English, in this brunette family, with his straight, neat features (not yet marred by a broken nose), his light-brown hair and blue eyes.

Those eyes look even more challengingly blue than usual as they meet his father's shrewd dark glance. George is ready for a showdown. With enthusiasm and an increasing stammer he dilates on Elizabeth Osmond's beauty and charm, until at last that quizzical look brings him to a flushed standstill.

"The girl's pretty—and you are in love with her," sums up Benjamin, after a pause: "Very good—but why come and tell me about it?"

"Because, Sir, I want your consent to my marriage."

"And if I withhold it?"

"Then, Sir, I shall wait a few months until I am of age—that is all."

Hearing the determination in his son's voice, Benjamin realises the futility of argument, but he raises one practical query: "How do you propose to support her?"

Here George is on firm ground. With the sublime optimism of youth he announces that he has the offer of an engagement in Jersey—two pounds a week. What more could a married man need?

Father and son take each other's measure for a long moment; then the older man capitulates: "All right, my boy—I'll make you the same offer. Two pounds a week, and"—(with an air of munificence)—"four pounds for each play you translate from the French."

Recounting the story in later years, George would add feelingly

that it took quite a lot of persuasion before he could obtain in addition a royalty of five shillings a night on his plays.

So George, at twenty, became a married man, and with characteristic energy and efficiency set to work producing a new generation of Conquests. By February 1858 his teen-age wife had presented him with a son, George Benjamin, who was followed as swiftly as Nature allowed by a daughter, Elizabeth, known as Lizzie. The children had an even more cosmopolitan heritage than their father; for Elizabeth Osmond's forbears came from Eastern Europe. Their exact nationality is doubtful, but it was probably a mingled strain of Polish Catholics and Turkish Jews; and it certainly gave her both intelligence and beauty.

In the spring of 1859, George superseded Montgomery as Acting Manager and Stage Manager, and from that time onwards Benjamin was content to sit back and take life more easily, letting his son assume the responsibilities of the theatre.

It was not all plain sailing, however. Having weathered the first uncertain years and placed the Grecian on a sound financial basis, Benjamin had to ride out an attack from the Puritans who objected to the Continental gaiety radiating from the place. The ball was set rolling by Mr. Balfour, in a parliamentary report on public houses:

"The most detrimental place of which I know, so far as women are concerned, is the Eagle Tavern in the City Road," he pronounced. "There are gardens, and statues round the gardens, and everything to attract. There is a large theatre, and there are theatrical representations during the week. I have seen women there whom I have recognised next day as common street-walkers. The gardens are open, with alcoves and boxes on each side, and lads and young persons are taken in there and plied with drink. The house is opened on Sunday evenings, but on Sunday there is no dramatic representation nor music. I have seen gentlemen come out drunk."

On a Sunday visit he had seen various rooms: "There is what is called the Chinese room, the ballroom, and the concert-room. They were all filled with persons drinking, and I saw a great number of female servants, and females of a certain description. There is no doubt upon that subject at all."

The attack was taken up by J. E. Ritchie in his book "The Night Side of London" (1857), with a chapter that is a masterpiece of muddled thinking. After remarking caustically that the Eagle Tavern "is situated in an appropriate locality in the City Road, not

far from a lunatic asylum and contiguous to a workhouse," he gives away his case by the admission:

"As a rule I do not think what are termed fast men go much to theatres. To sit out a five-act tragedy and then a farce is a bore which only quiet old fogies and people of a domestic turn can endure, and even where, as in the Grecian Saloon, you have dancing and singing and drinking added, it is not the fast men but the family parties that make it pay. There you see Smith, Brown, Jones and Robinson, with their respective partners and the dear pledges of their well-regulated loves. They come early, sit out *Jack Sheppard* with a resolution worthy of a better cause, listen to the singing from the Music Hall, return again to witness the closing theatrical performance, and enjoy all the old stage tricks, as if they had not heard them for the last fifty years. These worthy creatures see a splendour in the Grecian Saloon which I do not."

The "family party" atmosphere thus created is reinforced by a description of:

"... what I may call the domestic part of the audience—the fat old women with their baskets filled with prog, the pursy old tradesmen that drop in to smoke a pipe, and the various tribes of gents and bagsmen on their way home from the City."

Ritchie then bemoans at great length the fate of the young apprentices, fresh from school, who are lured into this den of vice. He ends with a paragraph that has an ingenuous charm of its own:

"'It's a beautiful place,' says Mrs. Smith to Mrs. Robinson, 'a'nt it, my dear?' as they sit eating questionable sausage-rolls and indulging in bottled beer. They see the pictures in the balcony, think the gas-jets quite miraculous, and admire the weak fountains and ambitious grottos, and they laugh even at the comic singer, a feat I cannot achieve anyhow. Evidently the Eagle Tavern audience is of the same genus as the Adelphi audience, a people easily moved to laughter, and much given to taking their meals with them."

Poor Mr. Ritchie! His outlook on life might have been brighter if he had been able to laugh at the comic singer and enjoy an *al fresco* meal!

What the Conquests thought of these attacks may be gathered from a farce by W. E. Suter, called *The Waiter at the Eagle*, in which the aura of discreet naughtiness associated with the gardens is neatly caricatured.

This piece, originally produced at the Surrey (1855) as *The Waiter at Cremorne*, has been rewritten to give local colour. The plot is simple and there are only four characters: Mr. and Mrs. Muddlebank, a male cousin with whom the latter is flirting, and Jenkins, who has called in answer to an advertisement for a manservant. In a long introductory soliloquy, Mr. Muddlebank expounds the story, and incidentally gives us a picture of the tea-gardens around 1860, to compare with the experiences of Miss Jemima Evans thirty years earlier.

"I strolled out for a walk, up and down the City Road. Oh! I was rather flushed with wine, and I dropped in at the Eagle. You know the Eagle. Everybody knows the Eagle. I walked about the grounds and beheld a charming creature—in fact a considerable number of charming creatures, but my charming creature I addressed. I invited her to partake of some refreshment. I soon discovered she had a partiality to rum and water. We sat down in a box. My head buzzed, and I suggested that we should tea, and the consequence was that we tea'd. Suddenly I thought of Mrs. M. and the tea scalded my throat. I fled, leaving behind my silver snuff-box, with a donkey's head on it. I have told Mrs. M. that I forgot it at a friend's house. Alas! ever since I drank that tea I have been full of remorse—my appetite is gone, my sleep is full of horrors—and I dream. I always see the Waiter at the Eagle with a plate of shrimps in his hands, exclaiming 'Shrimps for two, Sir.' Oh! cursed be the day I ordered shrimps for two."

We subsequently learn that Mrs. Muddlebank has been with her cousin in the adjacent supper-box. She has heard her husband's voice and fears that he has come to the Eagle in search of her.

The new manservant, Jenkins, turns out to be the Eagle waiter, who wants an easier post. Husband and wife recognise him separately, and each is convinced that he has come to blackmail. He himself has not specially noticed his clients and does not know them again, but is merely surprised at their obvious eagerness to propitiate him. The curtain falls on the dismissal of the interloping cousin and the reconciliation of the Muddlebanks—but not before Jenkins (as prone to soliloquy as his new master) has contributed some sidelights on life at the Eagle:

"I am a steady young man, free from the vices of my sex, and not at all addicted to running after the gals. I had plenty of temptations when I lived with Mr. Conquest—it was rather hot there, I can tell you—but I was blind to all except my duties."

After smashing a plate he comments :

"Mr. Conquest made me pay for breakages, so I never had any wages to take, all the while I was there, and owed him a great deal when I left."

and his reply to a question about breakfast-time is :

"I used to have breakfast early at the Eagle, because I used to go into the grounds and clean out the boxes."

Working hours were indeed long, judging by an alphabet rhyme of 1865, where the Grecian and the "Brit." find themselves in distinguished company :

*B is the Britannia, which was built up by a Lane,  
C is Covent Garden—long may English Opera reign;  
D is famed old Drury, where the "legitimate" holds sway,  
E is the Eagle Tavern, which is open night and day.*

At the end of 1857, a link with the old Garrick was broken in painful fashion by the suicide of Charles Freer, who, being out of work and destitute, cut his throat in his squalid lodgings. After his venture into management he had gone to America, but had only performed there once when he fell ill and was incapacitated for several months. Returning to England with a shattered constitution, he found himself superseded by younger men, and never regained his popularity.

At Whitsun, 1858, the Grecian, after being closed for some weeks, was reopened with important alterations. The entire area of the pit, pit-stalls, orchestra and stage had been sunk by nine feet, giving room for an extra gallery. The stage also had been enlarged, with better scenic and mechanical effects. After redecoration, the theatre, which now held 2,500 people, was one of the prettiest and most tasteful in London. Also, it was delightfully cool.

Around this period, England had a series of unusually fine summers, and this naturally brought extra custom to the Grecian, with all its outdoor amusements. On the first evening it was crowded out within five minutes of the doors being unlocked, and the full houses continued throughout the season.

The opening play was a burlesque of *Perdita*, in which Amilie Conquest—fresh from the Lyceum theatre, where she had done very well under her brother-in-law's management—played the

name part. Next month she scored again as the ill-treated lad Josephs in *It's Never Too Late to Mend*. (A part afterwards successfully played by her daughter, Cissy Farrell.)

This famous melodrama had a chequered and involved history. Charles Reade originally wrote a play called *Gold*, staged at Drury Lane in 1853. When this failed he rewrote it as a novel, "It's Never Too Late to Mend," published in 1858. From this book George Conquest, who had never heard of Reade's play, made a drama of his own, in which he played Peter Crawley. What followed is vividly narrated by John Parker,<sup>1</sup> who had heard the story from George himself:

"The famous novelist came down to see the performance and heartily congratulated young Conquest both on the piece and on Peter Crawley. The play was an enormous success and ran six months. Then Reade paid a second visit to the Grecian Theatre. 'Well, Conquest,' said he, 'what do I get out of this?' 'Out of what?' said Conquest. 'Out of my play,' said Reade. 'My play, Mr. Reade,' said Conquest. 'Your novel, if you like, but my play.' 'My novel *and* my play,' persisted Reade. Young Conquest offered to share his fees with the irate novelist, but Reade greedily demanded the whole lot. Old Mr. Conquest was referred to, and old Mr. Conquest addressed Reade with much vigour."

Reade, who was a barrister and fond of litigation, took the matter to law, and after protracted hearings, obtained an injunction against George Conquest's version; then he in turn dramatised his own novel.

An amazing scene marked the first night of this play, at the Princess's Theatre in October 1865. The torturing of the boy prisoner, Josephs, became so realistic that the actress playing the part fainted on stage, and Mr. F. G. Tomlins, the *Morning Advertiser* critic, rose in the stalls to protest. The manager, Mr. Vining, retorted that Tomlins had no business to interfere, since he had not paid for his seat; whereupon the audience took the critic's part, insisting upon an apology from Vining before the play was allowed to proceed.

The Lyceum venture had turned out disappointingly. After a good beginning, Dillon's attraction for London audiences had waned, and on March 28, 1858, he finally relinquished the theatre.

<sup>1</sup> In his obituary notice of George Conquest, published in *The Era*, May 18, 1901.

A year or two later he quarrelled, once and for all, with Clara, and they went their separate ways. By 1861 Clara was back at home: the girl of eighteen who had left the Garrick now joined the Grecian as an actress of some standing with a teen-age daughter of her own.

It must have been a joy to Clarissa, as old age crept up on her, to have this first and favourite of her daughters again by her side. Clarissa still kept up her dancing-school, and Clement Scott records that, at the local dances held in the National Schoolroom where the children of the parish were educated for a penny a week, "Mrs. Conquest's pupils" were in great request as partners. But as time went on she became less active, leaving more and more in the hands of her daughter Laura and her daughter-in-law Elizabeth.

Writing many years afterwards, H. G. Hibbert gives this description of her lessons:

"The old lady, in her day a famous dancer, had grown very fat and, sitting comfortably in her armchair, imparted the steps by nimbly moving her fingers on her knees."

One detail of this sketch, however, is contradicted by a portrait of Clarissa painted shortly before her death. At the age of sixty, she may well have preferred dancing with her fingers rather than on her toes, but fat she was not. The picture shows her as a tiny, bird-like figure, very upright in her black dress. Under the prim cap that befits a Victorian matron, her face—with its wide mouth quirked at the corners, tip-tilted nose and brightly interested eyes—is still *gamine*; the very wrinkles, intelligent and friendly, bear out her reputation for "affable manners and a kindly disposition."

While discussing the Grecian dancing-school, we should pay tribute to Erroll Sherson's book "The Lost Theatres of the Nineteenth Century," and at the same time give a warning. Sherson wrote as an old man, looking back on the delights of his youth; and since he had lived in contact with the theatre, his book is a gold-mine of information. But it should be savoured like the after-dinner reminiscences of cultured elders, not read as a text-book. Later writers of much more serious calibre have unfortunately accepted his statements as gospel rather than gossip, and have perpetuated a number of errors.

In one supremely misleading paragraph, Sherson amalgamates as "Mrs. Conquest's pupils" practically all dancers of note who ever appeared at the Grecian: Johnny Milano, Thérèse Cushnie, Flexmore, Deulin, the Leclercqs, Alice Lingard and Kate Vaughan.

Of these, all except the two last date from Rouse's time. Pierre Leclercq, the father of the family, as we have seen, was Clarissa's teacher, not her pupil. Milano had worked for her as a choreographer; his wife, Thérèse Cushnie, however, had probably been coached by Clarissa when she danced at the Garrick as a young girl. Alice Lingard—known in her "Grecian" days as Alice Dunning—may fairly be claimed as a product of the school, and so may Mary Anne Victor and the famous Kate Vaughan. Kate was the daughter of a Swedish musician named Candelon, who played in the theatre orchestra. When she first attracted notice at the Grecian in 1872, she was about seventeen. Here the time factor comes into consideration: the school accepted pupils between twelve and fifteen; therefore if Kate had been under tuition for several years she may have come to it just before Clarissa's death in 1867, but her real teachers must have been William Ozmond and young Mrs. Conquest.

Even if we cannot claim for the school all that Erroll Sherson does, everyone agrees that it provided an excellent training, of the rigorous Continental type that concentrated upon technique. From the point of view of Ballet development, it forms a connecting link between the schools of Duvernay and Katti Lanner.

While Clarissa superintended her pupils and kept a shrewd eye upon finance (on occasion she would go downstairs at night and plunge a stick into the barrels of beer, to test the honesty of the barmen), Benjamin mellowed gently into old age, loved and respected by all.

Every year in the early spring, following the tradition set by Rouse, he would give a dinner, to which about a hundred people were invited. Among the guests was always E. L. Blanchard—"that gentlest of critics who ever murdered his aspirates." In later years he told Clement Scott a good anecdote about this annual dinner. Each year the toast of "the Army and Navy" was proposed, with much wit and patriotic enthusiasm, by a fine-looking old gentleman, whom Blanchard took to be a veteran of Waterloo. His curiosity roused, the critic at last asked Benjamin to what Service his guest had belonged. "Well, no Service, so far as I know," chuckled old Conquest: "Don't you know him? The best fellow in the world! Why, he is the famous maker of military portmanteaux in the Strand!"

Both Blanchard and Clement Scott were welcome guests in

the private parlour behind the bar, where on cold nights Benjamin would treat them to rummers of dark brown brandy after the show. Handing round cigars he would chat to them—as a rule about young George, of whom he was justifiably proud.

Sala has described the general aspect and atmosphere of the Eagle at this time. In the windows, lithographs and wood engravings of costumed gentlemen declaring, in a variety of attitudes, that their name is Norval, or that they know a hawk from a handsaw. Below them the Grecian programme, playbills of other minor theatres, and bills advertising theatrical benefits.

After the show the actors troop in for a drink; mingling with them are the unemployed, who hope to pick up useful tips about future productions. The author brings in the stage-carpenter to “treat” him. And always, on the fringes of the crowd, are one or two threadbare old actors, subtly cadging for drinks or snuff. In the snuggerly behind the bar are the leading actors from the current play, with the landlord’s special friends. His daughter, in a black velvet dress and carrying a music case, comes in from the ballet at the adjoining theatre.

It is this mention of the landlord’s daughter as a ballet dancer which identifies the unnamed “theatre pub” in “Gaslight and Daylight.” As the date is 1859, it is probably Amilie—Laura and Isabella, still in their teens, would hardly have been wearing black velvet.

In the winter of 1863 Amilie went to Birmingham to dance in *The House that Jack Built*. Here she met Henry Farrell, and on February 7, 1864, they were married. Benjamin travelled up to Birmingham to give his daughter away. Although his son-in-law had the same name as his old rival at the Pavilion, this is pure coincidence, for the marriage certificate describes Henry’s father as a coach proprietor, Michael Farrell.

One of the pleasures which the Conquests were able to afford in their old age was a house at Brighton, where they could spend some of the leisure which came to them now that George was running the theatre and his wife and brother-in-law were helping with the dancing-school.

It was there that Isabella, still only twenty years old, married Henry Broomhead, a solicitor from Sheffield. (The name “Henry” seems to have been an infallible passport to the hearts of the Conquest girls!)

## THE GRECIAN

With Laura's wedding to Henry Dyson in the following year, Clarissa must have felt that her life-work was done: her daughters were settled, her school was in good hands, and she was beginning to feel very tired. Yet when she went down to Brighton for a holiday, in the autumn of 1867, it did not strike her family that she was more than slightly out of sorts.

On the last day of October she had a stroke, and though she recovered consciousness it soon became apparent that she was dying. When her son arrived from London she rallied for a while, and the practical Frenchwoman in her came uppermost. "Look after the money, George," she whispered, "or your father will be left without a penny!" She knew her generous, improvident Ben, over whom she had watched for so many years.

She died on Monday, November 4, and they brought her back to London, to lie in the cemetery at Kensal Green, where Liston, Madame Vestris and many other well-known theatre characters are buried.

## CHAPTER X

### *Evening at the Grecian*

BENJAMIN must have felt lonely indeed, with his wife dead and his daughters married and living in the North country. It is true that George's young family was growing up around him, and that faithful Aunt Ann stayed on to look after them, as once she had helped Clarissa mother the older generation; but a houseful of noisy youngsters can have been little companionship for a tired and elderly man. By now he had moved from the tavern to a house in the New North Road, and three years after Clarissa's death he astonished everyone by bringing home a young bride.

Jane Allen was a dancer at the Grecian, daughter of a carpenter at Pinner. She was half Benjamin's age and no doubt pretty—for "Billy Barlow" had never lost his eye for an attractive girl; furthermore, she was alive to the advantages of securing a rich and probably short-lived husband. So adroitly did she manœuvre, that by November 1870 she was able to ask him to make an honest woman of her.

If Benjamin had confided in his son, George would no doubt have dealt effectively with the situation; but the old man fell for the ruse. He married Jane in her father's presence, with none of his own family around, and made a will, settling an annuity on her and their expected child. In a few weeks it became apparent that the wedding had been unnecessary, but the situation could not be undone, and we can only hope that Jane paid for her house-room by giving her husband some solace in the last two years of his life.

In the first week of July, 1872, the Grecian had as its guest-star the tragedian J. B. Howe—"a very varied actor, short of stature but strong of lung"—who soon afterwards took over the Garrick theatre. On Friday evening, July 5th, the company were playing *Macbeth*, with George Conquest as one of the witches, when the news came that his father was dead. The curtain was immediately lowered and the audience sent home, with the promise that their tickets would be valid for a later date. . . . And so the wheel had come full cycle: it was strange indeed that George, as his father

lay dying, should have been playing the very part in which young Benjamin had first trodden the boards nearly half a century earlier.

They buried him beside Clarissa and her sister Ann—who had died in January 1871—at Kensal Green. *The Era* describes the funeral at some length, listing the people who were present: George Conquest and his son; the sisters, Mrs. Farrell, Mrs. Dyson and Mrs. Broomhead; officials and actors from the theatre. A week later the paper prints this revealing apology:

“In our notice of the funeral we omitted the names of Mrs. Conquest (widow of the deceased) and Mr. and Mrs. Allen, the parents of this lady.”

Poor Jane! Badly as she had behaved, one cannot help feeling a trifle sorry for her as, with her parents to lend moral support, she faced the united front of the three Conquest girls, bristling with black jet and antagonism, and the cold blue glance of their brother. Contempt could hardly go further than an ostracism that left reporters unaware of the dead man’s widow!

From this point Jane Allen disappears from the family history. We hear that she was inclined to raise trouble over her husband’s Will, but that George Conquest made short work of her. Probably she married again, for she did not come to share the grave at Kensal Green.

George was now the lessee of the Grecian theatre, which had virtually been his for several years. It was about this time that his two collaborators, Paul Meritt and Henry Pettitt, came to the Grecian. Both of them started in a small way: for thirty shillings a week, Pettitt wrote plays, checked the money at the bars, and collected house rents for his employer; while Meritt took tickets and checked the transfer money.

Meritt (really Maetzger) had a cosmopolitan background that must have appealed to George Conquest. His father, secretary to Count Strogonoff, was a native of Prague and a noted linguist, his mother a Yorkshirewoman. Born at Kiev, he was educated partly at Leeds Grammar School and partly at Antwerp. He was originally a carpet salesman, but soon took to playwriting. His first play *Sid, or Good out of Evil* (also called *Sid, or the Family Legend*) was produced at Doncaster in 1870 and brought to the Grecian next year.

Pettitt’s background was simpler. He was a young under-schoolmaster of Huguenot descent, who spent his evenings in

part-time work at the Grecian, until he abandoned his original career in order to write melodrama.

The two men were as strongly contrasted in physique as in environment: Meritt was a round, jovial fellow, like an adult version of the Fat Boy in "Pickwick"; Pettitt had the long, drooping figure and sad moustache of Mr. Pooter in "Diary of a Nobody." But they worked well together, and with George Conquest formed a triumvirate that was responsible for over a hundred plays.

Pettitt's melancholy air must have been deceptive, judging by an anecdote related about him in the *Era Almanack*—anonymous, but probably by Arthur Williams, who supplied several stories of the kind.

"I remember once being present at the Grecian," writes the narrator, "to see a Yiddisher amateur named Johnnie Jacobs, who could not speak four consecutive words of English correctly, play for a benefit. He 'strutted his hour' as Harold Hawk—pronounced by him Eril Dork—in a drama of the same name. But the performance was such that it 'collared the bird' to a frightful extent. And when the curtain fell, he was called before it to receive salvos of ironical plaudits, and be nearly the recipient of a chair hurled at him by Jack Coney from a stage-box on the prompt side.

"After the piece, Harry Pettitt and I were in front of the bar in the garden having a drink, and standing beside us were two dark-eyed Jewesses, also partaking of some refreshment. We guessed by their 'pewter platter' that they were friends of the 'aspiring Glendower,' and it caused Harry to say in their hearing: 'That Jacobs is a great man—how well he acted tonight! I know what he can play better than George Conquest.'

"'What, Sir?' asked one of the ladies.

"'Skittles,' replied Pettitt. And then some very choice Italian grated on our ears."

Jewish benefits, at which amateur actors appeared in parts of their own choosing, were a feature of the Grecian in the middle 1870's. Arthur Williams has a similar story to tell about an eccentric amateur playing the gipsy boy, Lemuel, in *The Flowers of the Forest*.

"The Jew having sold £20 worth of tickets, the house was packed, mainly with his friends, ready for fun. Lemuel—usually played by a girl—is supposed to be a youth of seventeen; as our friend was over forty, his face and figure were against him. On his first entrance, Lemuel is represented as being out poaching, and the property man had instructions to buy a real hare or rabbit,

which he could take for his own supper after use. Lemuel entered with gun in hand, and received a perfect ovation. He was supposed to see the hare, but his reception so upset him, and he became so shaky in his words, that he said: 'There's a fine fat puss, I'll bring her down,' and fired his gun in the air on the left side. The property man on the right side, with a fine eye to his supper, threw over Lemuel's head a thirteen-penny Ostend rabbit, already skinned and skewered, which Lemuel picked up among the screams and yells of his delighted friends."

From *Entr'acte* we have a lively picture of another Jewish benefit, which was accompanied by a powerful odour of fried fish and oil. In the theatre, George Conquest was delighting the audience by a capital rendering of the old Clown in *Behind the Curtain*—a drama originally produced at the Holborn and considerably pruned for the Grecian.

"One remark that I heard during the progress of the play amused me muchly. It was in the Dressing-Room scene, where the two villains of the piece are trying to make the old Clown intoxicated. 'Ah,' said a fellow-witness of the exciting scene, as he leant back in the stall and complacently surveyed the stage, 'Ah, he ain't 'arf so drunk as he was at the 'Olborn!'"

The rest of the programme consisted of the farce *Playing at Loo-Loo*, by Macdermott, which included one of George Conquest's sensational leaps. The critic, however, was disappointed in this, having expected too much in advance—he thought the ropes and wires too obvious. He did very much enjoy the dancing by Mrs. Conquest's pupils which concluded the entertainment, but for some reason or other it did not appeal to the rougher part of the audience: "Hisses greeted it from the gallery, and the poor young *corps de ballet* looked quite cut up about it." To see the dancing better he went up to the gallery, where he was greeted with a shout: "Now then, Charlie, ain't you going to give us a drink?"

"As I was not christened 'Charlie' I object to be assailed with the cognomen; and besides, this prosy observation drove all the poetry out of my soul and brought me once more to thoughts of place and time. . . . I vanished. *Note:* Advice to those about to marry—and to others. Go in for a Conquest."

In November 1872 George Conquest added a music-hall to his establishment. It was so contrived that theatre patrons who wanted to spend an hour or so listening to music could enter the hall

through the grounds of the theatre by purchasing a 6d. refreshment ticket, which gave admission to the area or balcony. Some excellent artistes appeared in this building, including Jolly John Nash, Julia Fitchett, Nat and Alice Ogden: the band leader was Oscar Barrett, who later succeeded Sir Augustus Harris at Drury Lane.

About this time Arthur Orton, the Tichborne Claimant, spoke from the platforms of the Grecian, the Britannia, and other East End theatres, in support of his case. This impostor, who was proved after a lengthy trial to be the son of a Wapping butcher, asserted that he was Sir Roger Tichborne, the missing heir to a large estate, and was accepted as such by the dead man's aged and credulous mother. There was a good deal of sympathy for him in the East End, where the popular view was summed up in a comment overheard after the verdict: "Well, if 'e *was* a butcher, why shouldn't 'e 'ave 'is rights?"

One distinguished artist who came to the Grecian around 1870 was G. H. Macdermott, a handsome and versatile young Irishman whose real name was Farrell. He started life as a bricklayer, but he must have acquired an education, for he wrote several plays, including a melodrama, *Driven from Home*. (This, incidentally, is *not* the play of the same title that later proved so popular at the Surrey.) Macdermott's chief title to fame is that he introduced a new word—jingoism—to the language. Since nowadays this word is deprecated as a synonym of aggressive national pride, it is worth while quoting the actual lines of the popular song from which it originated:

*We don't want to fight,  
But by jingo if we do,  
We've got the ships, we've got the men,  
We've got the money too.*

Another actor who graduated from the Grecian to the West End was Tom Mead, about whom Pettitt wrote an epigram, to the effect that he:

*Thanks God he is an Atheist,  
Is proud of being humble . . . , etc.*

Mead, though a good performer, had a treacherous memory and a disconcerting habit of correcting himself, which confused his fellow-actors and was apt to make the audience giggle. He would, for example, start off: "Is this a dagger in front of my eyes—I mean, is this a dagger which I see before me?"

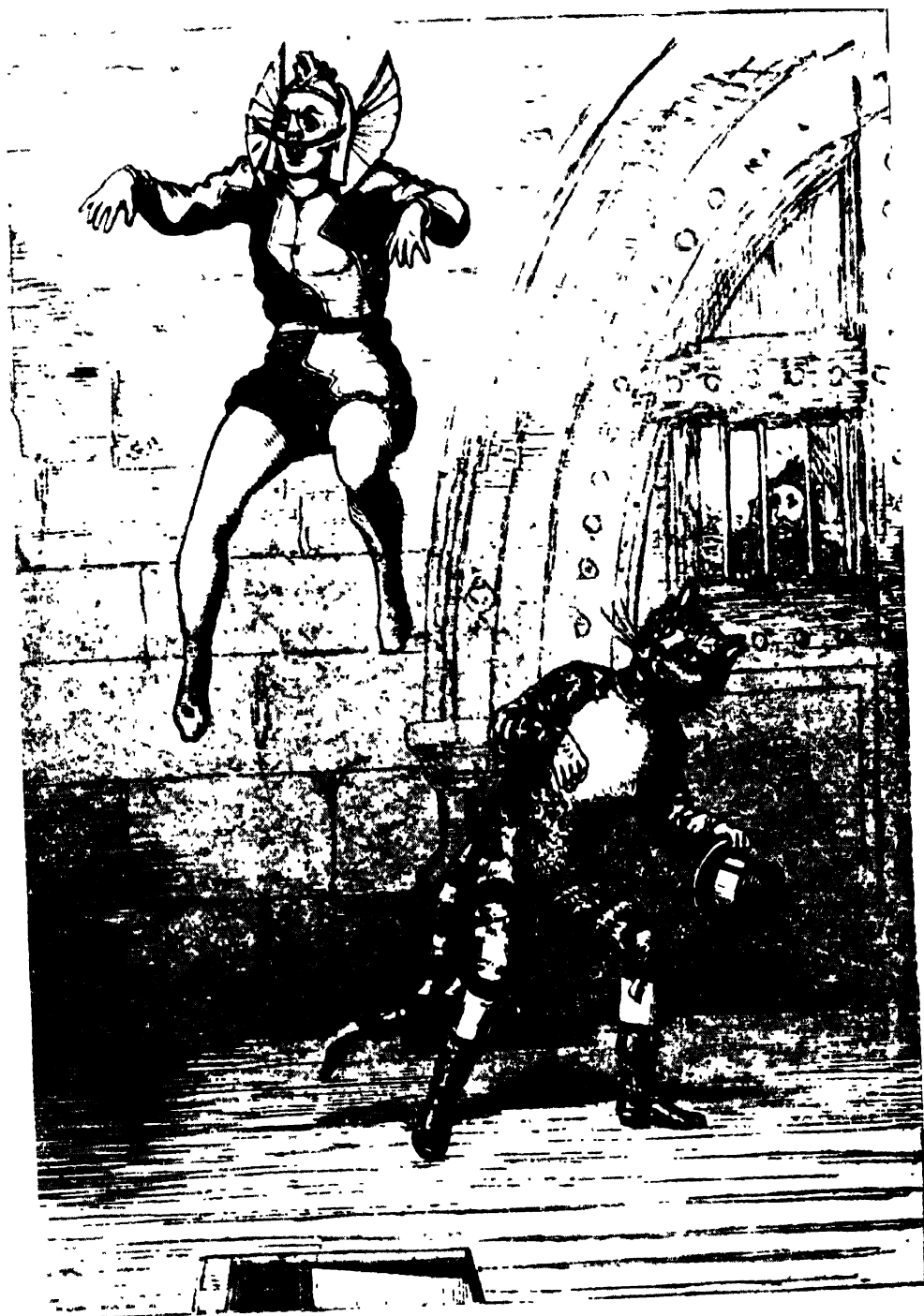
Kate Vaughan appeared as a juvenile actress under her real name of Candelon, playing Little Em'ly and Little Nell in adaptations of Dickens' novels, and Mary Kindly in Macdermott's play *The Weeds and Flowers of Erin*.

In November 1874 the names of two actors at the Grecian—George Sennett, the "heavy man," and John Clynds, the "juvenile lead," were brought into public notice as protagonists in a somewhat childish brawl, when Sennett brought a charge of assault against his fellow-actor. As related in Court, the dispute arose over Sennett's nightly death in a melodrama. Evidently he "upstaged" Clynds, who suggested that he should fall lower down. Sennett replied that he had received his orders where to die from the authors, and would not be taught by Clynds. The argument was resumed in the dressing-room, where, in reply to a charge that he used idiotic language, Sennett retorted that Clynds was a liar. (He denied in cross-examination having used a vulgar adjective in addition. He also denied that he was in the habit of bullying and blustering in the theatre.) After the performance the two men fought it out in the grounds, striking at each other with walking-sticks. General sympathy was with Clynds, judging from the evidence of Paul Meritt, who deposed that he had heard Sennett call Clynds a ——— liar. Sennett was a good actor, but witness thought him a blackguard.

This storm in a teacup was allayed by the magistrate ordering Sennett to accept a written apology from Clynds, and binding both men over to keep the peace.

One suspects that Sennett is the unnamed subject of another of Arthur Williams' candid anecdotes :

"The gentleman who played the villain and principal heavy parts had a greengrocer's shop, which took up his spare time in the day, and had engaged a long thin youth to take out the coals and as dresser at night. One evening he suggested that the youth should sit in the pit and applaud his master (the villain), which he did. On this particular night the heavy gentleman was more murderously inclined than ever ; for on every fresh outburst of crime—such as throwing his child into a lime-pit, kicking the mother of the aforesaid child, and several other trifles of lurid villainy—our young friend applauded his master vigorously, and seemed delighted when he wound up by killing his aged father, which evoked another tremendous round of applause. This so roused the virtuous indignation of the rest of the audience at the idea of applauding such double-distilled villainy, that they took the law into their



The Ogre (George Conquest).

Puss (Master Conquest).

Conquest and his Son in *Puss in Boots* (Crystal Palace 1873)



Scenes from *Spitz-Spitz*, the Grecian Pantomime

own hands and fired our young friend out. He returned to his master, our heavy gentleman, who, on seeing his valet fearfully mauled, with his nose bleeding, etc., said: 'What on earth have you been doing?' 'Applauding you—and it ain't good enough! Here am I, carrying out coal all day, dressing you at night, and getting a smack on the nose into the bargain—all for eight bob a week. It ain't good enough! I'm goin' to chuck it!' And he did."

However much the personnel of the Grecian might squabble among themselves, there was one point on which all were united—their devotion to "the Governor," George Conquest, who had the priceless gift of being able to make men work happily for him. An example of this is the vast output of plays which he wrote in collaboration. George would rough out the plot—usually based on some French drama or novel—indicate the highlights of the action, write a few salient passages, and leave the rest to his co-author.

One curious trait—which we have already noted when discussing the Grecian pantomimes—was his preoccupation with the *macabre*. A saner man than George Conquest could hardly be imagined; all who wrote of him, and those who are still alive to remember him, pay tribute to his kindness, his humour, and his courage in face of pain or bereavement. Yet his plays bear such titles as: *The Hanged Man*, *The Angel of Death*, *The Sole Survivor*, *Sentenced to Death*, *A Moment of Terror*, and so forth. That this was not entirely pandering to public taste is shown by his revival of *The Angel of Death* years later at the Surrey, when the vogue for this type of play was long past.

The original production, in 1861, had Clara Dillon in the title rôle and Tom Mead as the doctor hero. It was played in 1868 with Mead and Lizzie Mandlebert, in 1875 with Clynds and Miss E. Miller, and yet again in 1898 with James Aubrey and Cissy Farrell. In view of its outstanding success each time, it may be worth summarising the plot (as detailed in reports of the 1898 version, which Chance Newton helped to revise):

"Dr. Oswald Mentz is a clever but poor physician with an aged mother dependent on him. For her sake he makes a compact with the Angel of Death, who spares the old woman, on condition that he shall not attempt to save any patient claimed by the Angel. The next scene, on an island, introduces Count Ruffach and Baron Matheurs, suitor of the Count's daughter Marguerite. In the second Act, the Angel appears in the Count's château to claim his heir, Herr Braun, who dies suddenly. Count Ruffach confesses to the

Doctor that he has killed the father of the present Baron Matheurs in a duel. Mentz replies that he need not reproach himself, for the Baron was already dead from a heart attack before being run through. (His own father, who was present at the duel, has told him this!) In a ballroom scene the Baron, dressed as Mephistopheles, is challenged by Mentz and by Lanz Ruffach, Marguerite's brother. A duel is fought in a wood during a snowstorm, with the Angel, disguised as an old woman, watching it. The Baron is fatally wounded. The last Act takes place in a chapel, where Marguerite and Oswald are about to be married. The Doctor prays that his bride and his mother (again threatened by the Angel) may be spared, even if he be taken instead. Impressed by his faith, the Angel, exclaiming 'The compact is broken!' soars skyward, sparing the lives of all three."

Erroll Sherson, as a young boy, was particularly impressed by one of Conquest's early dramas, *Catherine Howard* (1860), which had a scene in a burial vault, with the heroine lying in her coffin. Recalled to life by the lamentations of her lover, she pushed off the lid and sat up in her shroud. Whereupon, amid the gasps and groans of the audience, a stout lady next to Sherson, quite carried away, sighed deeply and murmured: "Ah, poor dear, poor dear!"

As an actor, too, George Conquest enjoyed playing characters with some physical deformity or mental kink. He scored a particular success as Schriften, the One-Eyed Pilot, in a drama of the same name, based on the Flying Dutchman story (1877). The Pilot—a personification of the Evil Spirit—attached himself to Vanderdecken's son Philip and haunted him throughout his career; and all agreed that George's rendering of this "unspeakable monster" was something never to be forgotten.

In his obituary notices it was stated that he played Richard III and Shylock—and indeed these parts would appear ideally suited to his bizarre talent; but an intensive search has only brought to light one occasion when, at Paul Meritt's benefit in November 1872, he performed in a single act of the former play. *Entr'acte* has the rather oddly-worded notice:

"*The Lancashire Lass, Fortune's Frolics*, and an act of *Richard III*, in which Mr. George Conquest appeared, proved an amusing bill of fare."

It was remarkable that, though George stammered badly in ordinary conversation, his stutter never troubled him on the stage. Possibly it was mainly due to the speed of his thoughts outrunning

his tongue, in which case it would vanish with the greater deliberation of prepared theatre dialogue. Yet the amazing thing was that he stuttered all through rehearsals, to the point of embarrassing his company till some of its younger members choked down nervous giggles. Not until the curtain rose on the first night did they know that he would speak clearly.

In the winter of 1876 real tragedy for the first time struck at this happy and united family. Benjamin and Clarissa had died in the fullness of years, with their life-work completed: though their passing was sincerely mourned, it could only be viewed as a guerdon of well-earned rest. But George's eldest daughter Lizzie was only seventeen when she was snatched away from a life that seemed full of promise for her, both as an actress and as a woman.

Although so young, she had already attracted notice, and it was generally considered that she was the most gifted member of George's family. She fell in love with a young articled clerk, Thomas Beard, and during the summer of 1878 she ran away from home to marry him. There seems no special reason why she should have run away. The young man was the son of an old family friend, and was preparing himself for an honourable profession. Her father was too fond of her to have put up more than a token resistance: at worst he would probably have said, reasonably, that she was too young, and have recommended a long engagement. After all, had he not himself been prepared to marry, on two pounds a week, a teen-age girl? . . . But Lizzie had been born and bred to melodrama. As she slipped out of the house that summer morning and took a bus up the hill to Islington, she must have pictured herself as the heroine of a play called *Elizabeth, or The Clandestine Marriage*.

The young couple went to live at Brixton—in those days a pleasant suburb—and Lizzie tasted a short spell of happiness. It is true that her father was still estranged, but she had plenty of compensations—the fun of playing housewife in a home of her own, and already the promise of motherhood. Then, one day in November, she fell off a moving tramcar. She was not badly hurt, but the shock brought on a miscarriage; blood-poisoning set in, and within five days she was dead. What made the loss more poignant to her father was that he had not been called to her bedside in time, so that she had died without the assurance of his forgiveness.

A faded little photograph from Arthur Williams' collection is all that remains of Lizzie. At first sight she looks like a woman of thirty, with her piled hair and elaborate gown; but looking again, one sees that the dress is standing up of itself, with very little help from the adolescent body under it; the soft fair hair flops from its formal dressing onto a round, childish forehead. One has only to picture Lizzie with an urchin cut, wearing a sunsuit, to realise how young she really is. It is a face full of character, with Clarissa's wide mouth crinkling at the corners, and eyes set like George's, shaded on the lower lids. As one looks at the eager face, brimming over with life and fun, it calls up Edna Millay's quatrain:

*My candle burns at both ends,  
It will not last the night:  
But, ah! my foes and oh! my friends,  
It gives a lovely light.*

Perhaps Lizzie's death was one of the factors that influenced George Conquest's decision to leave the Grecian. It seems strange that he took this step so soon after opening a new theatre nearly the size of Drury Lane. This building was inaugurated on October 26, 1877, with a play by Conquest and Pettitt optimistically entitled *Bound to Succeed*. It stood on the site of the old Olympic Temple, the former stage being used for dressing-rooms, and the auditorium being converted into a dancing-hall.

The new theatre, designed by G. T. Robinson, was far ahead of its time in the attention given to fire precautions. There were no less than fifteen exits; the stalls, boxes and private boxes, being approached direct from the street; while the fireproof stone staircase allowed of the theatre emptying itself in a few seconds. Capacity was between 4,300 and 5,000, the seats being arranged in three tiers: on the ground floor a pit holding 1,800 persons, with six rows of stalls, a saloon, and two private boxes, hung in crimson with gold fringe and tassels and decorated with panels of quilted blue satin. (This, we regret to say, represented the taste of Henry Spry, who designed the decorations: it was, however, entirely to the liking of his contemporaries.) Above was a dress circle with seats for 500, eight private boxes and another saloon. The ceiling was of ornamental woodwork with ventilating shafts. A further eight private boxes were in the gallery, which seated about 1,800 persons. Lighting was by means of nine central stars.

Already in 1873 the *Entr'acte Almanack*, in an article on London pleasure gardens, had remarked that, with increasing music-hall competition, they were becoming an anachronism and would soon be extinct. Vauxhall was dead, and Ranelagh; White Conduit House and Bagnigge Wells were barely remembered; Cremorne closed down in 1877; of them all, only the Eagle was left. And Conquest, as a business man, had an uncanny flair. He may have thought that the time to sell was when his theatre was fresh and clean, and while its vast seating capacity was well filled.

Possibly he was already thinking of the Surrey—then held by William Holland—for a connection was set up between the two theatres in 1878. On May 25th the Conquests repeated their Christmas pantomime at the Surrey. It was preceded by George's melodrama *A Lion's Love*, but evidently the house was impatient to get the pantomime started. A noisy reception led the actors to shorten the play, so that it ended half-an-hour too soon. What followed is related in all seriousness by *Entr'acte*:

"Mr. W. Holland came forward to explain, and during the wait Miss Marie Henderson kindly volunteered to recite 'The Charge of the Light Brigade,' under conditions that could not be considered by any means favourable, for the noise in the gallery was incessant, and during the whole evening not one moment's decent order was to be observed."

Two months later, the Surrey reciprocated by sending their drama *The Orange Girl* to the Grecian.

In the late autumn George Conquest announced that he was disposing of the theatre, and the programme of *Hokee-Pokee* at Christmas time bore the sad legend—*Farewell Pantomime*. It ran for many weeks, as usual, but at last the time came to say goodbye.

On March 17, 1879—twenty-eight years since the Conquests first came to the Grecian—their farewell benefit was held. On behalf of the company, Mr. W. W. James presented George Conquest with a handsome silver loving-cup, which was acknowledged in a rhymed address written for the occasion. A note of comedy was introduced into the proceedings when George tried to introduce his successor, Mr. T. G. Clark, as they played at cross-purposes and dodged each other in and out of the curtains in a way that added quite unintentionally to the amusement of those in front.

The new proprietor had made a large fortune in the marine store business, and was in process of losing it in the theatre. After a short and unprofitable lease of the Adelphi he came to the

Grecian: it was remarked of him that he would have been better qualified to command the Channel Fleet than to harness the Eagle. He suffered, too, by contrast with his predecessor; for critics and audiences who had grown up in the Conquest tradition were only too ready to carp at the newcomer. His initial production called forth a caustic notice from *The Era*:

“The new proprietor, we suppose, after the first night’s experience, will need no hint from us to scold his printer, who has unintentionally made his bills amusing by his blunders, and his supers and scene-shifters who, while behind, strived (*sic*) their utmost to drown the voices of the performers in front.”

To Clark’s credit, however, be it said that the members of the company and the theatre staff were all retained by him and generously treated. He gave the scene-painter *carte blanche* in the preparation of a striking setting for his opening piece—a play by James Guiver with the somewhat ill-omened title *The Last Stroke of Midnight*.

Probably George Conquest’s intention had been to visit America in 1879, before settling down at a new theatre, but there may have been a hitch in his plans. Despite the silver cup and the rhymed farewell, he had not finally left the Grecian, for during 1879 he produced several more plays there, including *The Queen’s Colours* (May 31), *The Mesmerist* (September 28), and *Sentenced to Death* (December 14).

One last pantomime, *Harlequin Rokoko*—which we have already described—came to boost the now shaky finances of the theatre; and then it really was goodbye.

## CHAPTER XI

### *" Grim Goblin "*

THE Conquests set out for America in the summer of 1880, meaning to make a long stay. They went, bag and baggage, with their full company and all the complicated machinery of their flight-apparatus. Even the young children—Fred, Daisy and Arthur—were taken, with their nursemaid. George Conquest had an ambitious programme: after producing *Grim Goblin* in New York, he was to tour the main cities, returning in time to prepare a new spectacle for Christmas.

The opening date at Wallack's Theatre was August 16. A week of intensive rehearsals had ensured that no hitch should occur in the paraphernalia of traps and ropes that were being tried out in this new environment. At the dress rehearsal everything went perfectly.

So it did on the first night, until near the end, when George Conquest and his son were chasing each other through the air in a phantom fight. They were flown on a counter-weight system, so that a slip by either man would throw the other off balance. Then the disaster happened.

As George reached the top of his leap, the rope he grasped came away in his hand. He crashed some twenty feet to the ground, falling on a rough surface just inside the wings. George the younger dropped heavily in full view of the audience, but managed to alight on his feet.

The spectators were startled, but since the chief victim was out of sight no one realised how bad the accident had been. As the piece was nearly finished, the company came on stage for a final chorus and the curtain was quickly rung down.

Dr. C. Phelps, a surgeon who was in the house, took charge. A stretcher was improvised from one of the canvas flats, and George, who was conscious and in agony, was carried to his hotel, where the demon costume was cut from his limbs. He was suffering from multiple injuries, but the worst was a compound fracture of the left leg. At sight of this the surgeon looked grave. A consultant

was called in and they made their decision—amputation. But they had underrated their patient.

"I came to America with two legs," said George, "and I am going back with two."

"I am sorry, Mr. Conquest. I fear your choice lies between amputation and death."

George did not hesitate: "Bring me pen and paper," he ordered, "and call in my son."

He was the calmest person in the room, as he dictated and signed his last instructions, embraced his wife and son, and settled down stoically to await the outcome.

For two days the theatre remained closed, while the company investigated the accident and rehearsed for a fresh opening, with young George in his father's part and an actor named Manly taking over George's.

Inspection of the rope that had caused the accident showed a clean break with no trace of fraying. It is, of course, possible that it had caught on a sharp edge of metal and had severed under George's weight, but the Conquests were convinced that it had been deliberately cut. The newspapers denied this and "played down" the whole incident.

On the following Monday the pantomime was resumed, and all went well up to the point where George had fallen. Then, as young Conquest and Manly swung through the air, there came a cry: "For God's sake pull in the rope!" and an answering voice: "All right, don't be afraid." Once more a wire snapped. George landed on his feet behind the wings, with a heavy thud, while Manly collapsed in a heap on the stage. Neither was seriously hurt, and they carried through to the end, so that only the first few rows of the audience knew there had been a second accident.

This crystallised young George's suspicions that an enemy was at work. During the performance he had noticed a man in a position where he could have tampered with the jumping apparatus. As soon as the curtain was down, George went into action. He was twenty-two, six foot tall and powerfully built—a formidable opponent. Rushing up to the landing where the man he suspected was still lurking, George tackled him. There was a free fight, which ended in the American being thrown over the railing.

No summons for assault followed. Like the original crash, this

## “GRIM GOBLIN”

was not a subject on which the Press cared to dilate. But the story remained in the annals of the Conquest family, to be retailed with a grim satisfaction.

Meanwhile, the invalid had confounded his doctors by taking a turn for the better. This was by no means his first serious accident, and his matter-of-fact attitude towards it undoubtedly aided his recovery. The journalists, deceived by his courage and jauntiness, prophesied that he would be well again in three or four weeks, but this was obviously impossible. In any case, it was too late to save the pantomime: without the magic of the elder Conquest's name, the public quickly lost interest in it. Cancellations came from the managers in the inland cities. Theodore Moss, who had brought the Conquests to Wallack's, was reckoned to have lost some \$10,000 through the venture.

As misfortunes never come singly, the visit to America was further troubled by a dispute with Walter Dando—husband of Madame Aenea, the famous flying fairy of the Grecian—who claimed to be the inventor of the Conquests' flight apparatus.

Ill-luck dogged them to the end. Two days before the pantomime was withdrawn, there was a similar accident to Mlle. Etheria, the flying fairy—who was in fact little Ada Conquest. She had been up several times and was making her final descent, when the wire broke and she fell several feet. Manly tried to catch her, but she hurtled through his arms and struck the stage head foremost. After her first sharp cry of pain and fright she pulled herself together and, with a courage that would have been commendable in any performer, but was remarkable in a young girl, let Manly and her brother lead her forward, to reassure the spectators that she had not been fatally injured. Her mouth was streaming with blood, she had broken her nose and knocked out several teeth, but this, apart from shock, was the extent of the damage.

Interviewed by journalists, her brother George expressed himself strongly on the subject of their American visit: “This is our last week here,” he said, “and we are heartily glad of it. We have had so many accidents here that we are becoming tired of it. We have had four falls since we opened. We don't know how the accident occurred to my sister. No one is to blame. Our own men work the stage. They are thoroughly familiar with all the machinery, and how we have had so many accidents I cannot understand.”

Less than a month after their arrival, they embarked for England—and ran into a violent storm. The one remembrance of that troublous voyage that the child Arthur brought back with him was the sight of his quicksilver father lying bound and helpless like an Egyptian mummy, lashed into his bunk for fear the heavy seas might make his injuries worse by throwing him out on the floor.

After several months George Conquest recovered, and though he limped to the end of his life, once the immediate effects of the accident wore off he did not use crutch or stick. But this was the end of his career as an acrobat. Probably in any case it would not have lasted much longer, for he was over forty and had always exerted himself to the limits of his strength. Only four years previously, when asked to contribute to an autograph album, he had selected Puck's lines :

*I go, I go, see how I go;  
Swift as an arrow from a Tartar's bow.*

At the time, nothing could have been more evocative of the man than this quotation, written in his speedy, cursive handwriting, with the i-dots and t-crossings flying ahead. Now, alas! the Grim Goblin middle age had caught up with him.

## CHAPTER XII

### *General Booth gets "The Bird"*

LEFT to his own devices, Thomas Clark continued to lose money at the Grecian. He tried to retrieve his fortunes at Christmas, 1880, by a lavish presentation of Pettitt's pantomime *King Frolic, or Harlequin the Coral Tree, the Golden Key, and the Naughty Boy that was wrecked at Sea*, which, judging by the notices, had a plot as confused as its title. What it lacked in coherence, however, it made up for in scenery and costumes, and in a really excellent cast. King Frolic was our old friend Sennett; the Naughty Boy was Herbert Campbell—afterwards to win fame as Dan Leno's partner in a series of Drury Lane pantomimes; while Mary Anne Victor and the brothers Arthur and Fred Williams also took part.

The pantomime flourished until mid-April, but it had been so extravagantly mounted that Clark was not much the richer for its success. During the rest of 1881 he played for safety, with such time-honoured melodramas as *East Lynne*, *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *Don César de Bazan*. At Christmas he continued the Conquest tradition with a pantomime from Henry Spry called *Happy-Go-Lucky*, which on its opening night ran for five hours before coming to the Harlequinade!

But the sands were running low. At the end of June a rumour gained ground—an incredible rumour which left the theatre world divided between chuckles of ribald laughter and signs of real and poignant regret: the gay, gallant Grecian, of the ballets and bals masqués, the discreet supper-boxes and giddy dancing-platforms, the blood-curdling melodramas and fantastic pantomimes—the Grecian, which had been the cultural focus of the East End—was to fall into the clutches of "General" Booth and his Salvation Army! It had been sold by auction on June 22, and the "General" had paid a deposit, optimistically expecting that the Lord (or the public) would provide the rest of the purchase-money.

The chuckles became louder when that rumour was confirmed in July by a law-suit between Booth and the executors of Thomas Rouse over the future of the Eagle tavern. A good deal of

interesting information came to light about the early days of the Eagle. The original lease, for sixty-one years, was taken by Thomas Rouse on May 8, 1840, from the Trustees and Churchwardens of St. Botolphs. A sub-lease was granted on March 24, 1851, to Benjamin Oliver, at whose death it was transferred to his son George. By its terms the Eagle Tavern was "to be used and kept for an Inn, Tavern, or Public House, and conducted in an orderly manner." The plaintiffs received £1,301 a year rent, and were paying only £350.

The stipulation that the premises should be conducted in an orderly manner gave rise to various legal witticisms and plenty of laughter in court; for when trying to raise the purchase money for the Grecian, General Booth had published letters proclaiming his intention to gather together there "tens of thousands of the lowest classes, rejoicing in the Lord."

The plaintiffs' counsel drily observed that a gathering of tens of thousands of the lowest and worst of people in the Eagle might not be a recommendation to the place with the magistrates. His opponent riposted that he could hardly imagine tens of thousands assembling in the tavern for drinking purposes. When the laughter had died down, the Judge opined that he did not attach much importance to the "tens of thousands": it was a very excusable figure of speech. Judgment was given to the effect that General Booth must continue to keep the Eagle open as an inn: the nature of the refreshment sold there was left to his discretion.

Booth aroused a good deal of indignation in theatrical circles by letters he published in an attempt to raise the balance of the purchase-money, in which, with the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, he represented the Grecian as a den of iniquity, and its frequenters as "dancing their way to perdition" on its famous platform.

In view of his innuendoes, the rules printed by George Conquest on his programmes make interesting reading:

## RULES

No Boys or young Girls admitted into the New Hall or permitted to dance on the Platform.

No person of known immorality admitted into the grounds, Theatre, or Hall.

Any person committing any breach of decorum, or making use of offensive or improper language will be immediately expelled.

## GENERAL BOOTH GETS "THE BIRD"

The hero of the controversy was John Clynds—by now Clark's stage manager and leading man—who wrote a letter in defence of the Grecian for which he was publicly thanked by the Church and Stage Guild. Clynds remarked pithily:

"The 'scenes nightly to be witnessed' there are such scenes as are nightly to be witnessed in the greatest of our great theatres; viz.: an earnest desire on the part of all engaged under my direction to place before the public dramatic representations which may give intellectual pleasure and enjoyment to those who care for such pleasures and enjoyments; to gain credit, respect and approbation for such labour; and to put as much money as possible in the pockets of the commercial gentlemen interested in the sole proprietor.

"That the proprietor should dispose of his property for the uses of the Salvation Army is his business, and, I take it, he has the right to do what he pleases with his own, and to sell to the highest bidder.

"That General Booth should beg for contributions for the purchase, I have not the remotest objection. No doubt he works honestly and zealously in his cause, but I do hope and trust that the 'scenes nightly to be witnessed' in the Grecian theatre, viz.: artistes earning their living by the exercise of an honourable profession, are not more distasteful to public decency nor injurious to public morals than some of the exhibitions of the Salvation Army."

If Clynds, with the editorial approval of the papers that published his letter, had stood up for the personnel of the Grecian, the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* put in a good word for its audiences:

". . . I must register my mild protest against the intemperate language used in letters printed in the public press regarding the purchase of the Grecian Theatre by 'General' Booth of the Salvation Army. The establishment, under the control of the first and second Conquest, was a model of propriety. The hard-working lads and lasses of the City Road—mostly printers and artificial flower makers—sought it, not for evil purposes, but as a place of recreation and amusement, where the toils and anxieties of the day might for a few moments be forgotten. . . . It is rather hard for the decent boys and girls of the crowded district round about the City Road, Islington, to find that they are described by Archbishops and others, who favour Mr. 'General' Booth with letters and nominal subscriptions, as 'lost souls, wicked sinners, burning brands' and other epithets that come so willingly to the charitable pen of sanctity."

Clark kept the theatre open until the first week in August, so as to profit by the Bank Holiday traffic. The last pieces played there were a popular melodrama, *Lost in London*, and *Don César de Bazan*—one of Clynds' favourite starring rôles.

On August 3, Blanchard's diary carried this sad note:

"With this week the Grecian Theatre ceases to be a place of amusement and passes into the hands of the Salvation Army, represented by General Booth."

A cartoon published in *Entr'acte* on August 19 sums up the popular reaction to this news. It shows George Conquest, with tears streaming down his face, standing on the roof of the tavern just behind its guardian Eagle, which is looking back at him with a puzzled expression. Clark, on his right hand, peering over the edge to watch the antics of the Salvationists below, exclaims: "O, look at 'em!" while on the other side Frederick Robson looks on with a sardonic grin. (Why not that other shade, far more intimately connected with the Grecian—old Tom Rouse?) George speaks the caption line: "And has it come to this?"

Details of the transaction are given in *The Era* on August 12. Only £8,424 10s. 2d. of the £16,750 purchase money had been received by General Booth, but the balance had been temporarily lent by friends, to be repaid at periods varying from one week to three months. The theatre properties and scenery were sold by auction, and at five o'clock on Sunday morning the soldiers and friends of the Army assembled in Finsbury Square, to march at five-thirty to the Eagle and fix their flag over the building. It was then closed for a few weeks, for repainting and structural alterations.

At the end of September the premises reopened. *The Era* gives an interesting description of the converted (in all senses of the word!) establishment:

"The exterior of the Eagle Tavern, henceforth to be known as the Salvation Army Hotel, has been painted a light stone colour, the king of birds which surmounts the edifice wearing a bright yellow hue and red wings. Excellent sleeping accommodation is provided for over seventy persons, and facilities are afforded for supplying hundreds at once with 'proper refreshment.' This may be construed to mean refreshments that are not intoxicating, a decision in Chancery only requiring the Army to retain the licence

## GENERAL BOOTH GETS "THE BIRD"

of the tavern, and leaving them free to do what they like with the premises, provided the licence is kept. The hotel contains a banqueting hall for 600 persons.

"The new Grecian theatre has been lighted from the roof for day services, while there are star and other brilliant gas lights for use at night. The stage has been transformed into a platform with large 'soldiers' galleries' at the side and in the rear. The orchestra has made way for the 'penitent form.' The interior, reckoned to accommodate 5,000, has been cleaned and redecorated. The old theatre (holding 3,000) has been entirely renewed and converted into a music hall. A huge tent covers the circular dancing platform (accommodating 4,000). Altogether, there is accommodation for 15,000 people. The cost of alterations has been £1,500; there is still £8,867 to be raised on the purchase price."

The East End crowds did not take kindly to being deprived of one of their favourite places of amusement. When the premises were opened to the public at twelve-thirty on September 22, long before that hour the streets were crowded by a noisy mob, hooting and howling and throwing mud. From *The Times* we have a picture of the scene :

"Crowds of the humble classes of society, who presumably would never enter any church or chapel or ordinary place of worship, flocked round the doors of the Grecian. . . . The prayer meeting was led by the London Major, Major Smith, described as a converted acrobat. This was succeeded in the evening by an open rejoicing meeting, and it was impossible to accommodate all who sought admission. The Salvationists' solos, especially those of Major Smith, were loudly encored. Thanks to the excellent arrangements of the Police, directed by Chief Inspector Hunt and Inspector Geary of the G-Division, the Salvationists sustained no bodily harm, and admirable order, under the circumstances, was maintained."

The last sentence makes one lift an eyebrow. . . . Can our august leading journal be indulging in sarcasm? A further ironic note is the strong protest of the Shoreditch Vestry when General Booth submitted to them a little bill of some £300 for police protection.

One last glimpse of the Grecian as a theatre is afforded by the litigious Sennett, who sued T. G. Clark for wrongful dismissal. The case was heard in December 1882, and the principal witness was the stage manager, Clynds, whose story throws a revealing light upon conditions at the theatre, once the master-hand of George Conquest had been withdrawn :

"Clynds said that Sennett had been studying his part in *The Duke's Motto* for three or four weeks. Sennett was so imperfect that there was a special rehearsal for him. On Thursday, witness said to plaintiff: 'George, tomorrow is Good Friday. Stay at home and read this part up.' On Saturday there was a special rehearsal—it lasted five hours, in consequence of Sennett being so imperfect. Witness said: 'Really, George, this is disgraceful.' On the night of the performance, Miss Macdonald (the actress sharing the scene with Sennett and another actor) caused a slight 'stage wait'—about half a minute. Plaintiff was not able to give or take his cues, and this lasted throughout the play. The audience hissed. There was a general 'stick' in the oratory scene, and some of the play had to be left out. When the plaintiff came off stage, he said to the witness: 'Thank you, Jack, old boy, for pulling me through. I apologise to you.' Witness said: 'What is the use of apologising, when the harm is done?' and he added: 'For your own sake, read up the part tomorrow.' He advised Mr. Clark not to dismiss him, but to give him another chance.

"Algernon Symms was asked on the Sunday to take Mr. Sennett's part, and he got it up by the Monday.

"T. G. Clark said that on the Saturday evening he heard complaints made as to Mr. Sennett's acting in *The Duke's Motto*, and Mr. Sennett was hissed. In his opinion, Sennett must have been either a fool or drunk on that occasion. He had no motive in getting rid of Sennett."

The magistrate, however—who can never have had the agonising experience of sweating over a prompt-book while an actor disorganises a scene by giving wrong cues—seemed to think that Clark's motive had been to save a double salary (for Sennett's wife left at the same time), when he was on the brink of giving up the theatre altogether. Judgment was given for Sennett, with £250 damages.

After its stormy beginning, the Salvation Army's reign at the Eagle soon lost interest for the journalists. Only *Entr'acte*, which apparently had a personal dislike for the "General," kept up a sniping campaign. At Christmas 1882, it published a cartoon of Booth as Pantaloon—looking rather like a seedy Shylock—being prodded in the nether regions by a red-hot poker marked "Public Opinion." Two more cartoons during 1883 draw attention to the financial difficulties which had attended the venture from the first. One shows Booth at a crossroads and is captioned: "He hardly



Messrs. CONQUEST and PETTITT,  
GREGIAN DRAMATISTS.

Conquest and Pettitt as Dramatists



Scenes from *Grim Goblin* at the Grecian Theatre

## GENERAL BOOTH GETS "THE BIRD"

knows whether to make the 'Eagle' a teetotal shop or a public-house"; while in another George Conquest contemplates the Eagle tavern and remarks: "I wonder if I shall ever be back there?"

More explicit are two comments in its gossip column "Merry-go-Round." In February it says:

"If Mr. Booth were to secure Kate Vaughan to do a few steps at the Grecian temple, he would proselytise thousands of our *jeunesse dorée*. Miss Vaughan would not be a stranger, I think, to the City Road, for I fancy that when I first saw her execute those graceful curves, it was at the Grecian. She was one of Mrs. Conquest's pupils."

and in May it brings out its claws and scratches hard:

"General Booth did not succeed the other day in evading payment of the rates on the Grecian, though it must be said that he tried very hard. Never mind, General, it will not always be thus, for, as you sing: 'In Heaven, we part no more.'"

There was general satisfaction when in December 1884 the Grecian concert-room was reopened as a music-hall by a Mr. Broom.

"It is said that 'a new Broom sweeps clean,' and it may be hoped that the proprietor of the Royal Eagle Music Hall will brush away the cobwebs of puritanical bigotry that have been accumulating there for the last year or two, and give his neighbours the chance of enjoying a rational entertainment."

The lease had seventeen years to run, but as it drew to an end the Salvationists decided that it was not worth while renewing their tenure. In April 1898 news came that the buildings were to be pulled down. This evoked a nostalgic picture from *Entr'acte* of the gardens in their palmy days:

"Here was a blend of the playhouse and the pleasure-garden, for you could witness a blood-curdling drama, and then come out in the grounds, enjoy a smoke, shoot for nuts, take a shock from a galvanic battery, or have a waltz on the dancing-platform presided over by Mr. Tripp, an excellent master of ceremonies. A 'go' of Scotch would ensure an introduction and pleasant chat with this excellent officer, who afterwards would be pleased to introduce you to one of his lady friends, who would take you round the platform in double quick time. . . .

## THE GRECIAN

"At pantomime time multitudes of visitors would be waiting for admission, and after they had been waiting in the rain for some time, and had become thickly seated, an evaporation process would be started which dealt out no particularly sweet fragrance to the folks in the private boxes. But I loved the old Grecian, and I have seen some admirable performers there."

The writer sketches the decline of the Grecian after George Conquest left it, ending with a characteristic crack at his *bête noire*: "And Mr. Booth did not even bring it salvation." When, a year later, the demolition actually began, he amplified this quip as follows: "This is the second theatre which has been absorbed by the Salvation Army that has been overtaken by the Destroying Angel." (The first being the little "Dusthole" in Tottenham Street, which we first met as the Regency, and which has now been rebuilt as the huge Scala.)

In September 1899, on hearing that the house-breakers were at work, Warwick Wroth went on a melancholy pilgrimage to the site. He leaves us a last glimpse of the gardens which had given so much pleasure to three generations of Londoners:

"The Eagle garden presented itself as a large paved square, which, judging from its two surviving trees, could never have been truthfully described as thickly wooded. Conspicuous features were the large rotunda opposite the entrance, with its pit, now floored over, and the 'new' theatre (of 1877) adjoining Shepherdess Walk, practically unaltered, though dingy and dirt-begrimed beyond description.

"The Oriental orchestra in the garden still showed traces of its gaudy colouring and a melancholy brick wall displayed remnants of primitive grotto-work. One could trace near the centre of the grounds the concrete-covered circle where many a light-hearted couple had danced before the days of the Conquests. (B. O. Conquest covered this space with a permanent platform.) The rows of alcoves, with the balcony for promenaders above them, were still there, although no longer brightly painted, but mostly boarded up and filled with headless Venuses and Cupids—pagan deities of the gardens who flourished circa A.D. 1838–1882."

Soon after this the huge Eagle Tavern was pulled down, and in August 1900 the smaller red-brick public house, which still exists, was opened. In this saloon there is a white model of the Grecian theatre; several of its playbills adorn the walls, together with a large card of the old rhyme "Pop goes the Weasel." A few yards farther down the road is a single-story eating-house called "Grecian

GENERAL BOOTH GETS "THE BIRD"

Café." Nothing else remains to tell the pilgrim that he has reached the spot about which so much has been written. On the site of the theatre itself there is a large police-station.

It is odd, incidentally, how the Salvation Army and the Law have followed in the footsteps of the Conquests, since there is also a police-station on the site of the Garrick, and a Salvation Army hostel abutting on the ruins of the Surrey theatre.



PART III

THE SURREY



## CHAPTER XIII

### *Over Blackfriars Bridge*

It was obvious that George Conquest could not exist for long without a theatre. In the spring of 1881 there were rumours that Isabel Bateman was ready to relinquish the management of Sadler's Wells and that Conquest, who had always been fond of this theatre where his father had played as a young man, would succeed her; but the suggestion came to nothing.

In June, however, it was definitely known that he and Paul Meritt had leased the Surrey theatre, where William Holland had been in difficulties for some time. For the next twenty years the Surrey was the Conquests' realm, consolidating under their guidance the reputation it already possessed for pantomime and melodrama.

The theatre had a long and chequered history, dating back for a century. It was first opened in 1782, under the title "The Royal Circus and Equestrian Philharmonic Academy," by Charles Dibdin, the song-writer and composer, and a trick-rider called Charles Hughes, as a rival attraction to Astley's Amphitheatre. Its nomenclature is rather confusing: it was called the Royal Circus until 1810, when Elliston renamed it the Surrey; in 1814 it reverted to its original title for five years, but from 1819 onwards it was finally called the Surrey.

As early as 1771, Hughes had constructed a "ride" in Stangate Street, Lambeth, which he called The British Horse Academy; but the authorities had obliged him to close it. The idea of exploiting the popular taste for everything medieval, by feats of horsemanship dressed up as historic pageantry, was Dibdin's. On a site in St. George's Fields owned by Colonel West, the two men built, at a cost of £15,000, an open-air arena intended for daylight performances, which were, of course, dependent upon the weather. Under the first (unwritten) contract, Dibdin was to be sole manager for life and receive one-quarter of the profits, Hughes was to conduct the horse department, and Grimaldi (father of the famous Clown) to be ballet-master.

They ran into trouble almost at once, not having realised that the burletta licence which they required could not be granted by the Lord Chamberlain, as they were outside the bounds of the City of Westminster. In an attempt to circumvent the law they engaged a company of child actors, advertising that: "Feats of horsemanship will be relieved by the efforts of a number of children educated in the Academy, who will perform their exercises in music, dancing, oratory, etc."

There were sixty of these children, several of whom afterwards became famous. Among them were Miss De Camp, who married Charles Kemble; Miss Romanzini (Mrs. Bland) and Miss Wilkinson (Mrs. Mountain). A modern note is struck by the claim of the management that they arranged for the education, in between performances, of their pupils.

The Circus opened on November 7, 1782, with a programme consisting of:

Grand Entrée of Horses.

A Ballet *Admetus and Alceste*, by the Children.

Feats of Horsemanship by Hughes' pupils.

*Mandarine, or the Refusal of Harlequin*—a Pantomime parody, by the Children.

Barely a month elapsed when the Surrey Magistrates took steps to close the Circus; when the audience resisted, they called in the military and read the Riot Act from the stage. Ironically, both Hughes and his rival Astley were arrested on the same day (December 27) and taken to New Bridewell. They were liberated on January 13, and shortly afterwards Hughes was able to obtain his licence. Astley, on the other hand, was refused a renewal, with the result that he went to Paris and spent several years there.

The new season's licence, for music and dancing, was granted in the sole name of Hughes, who had been working to cut out his partner. In March 1783 the Circus reopened. Fox and stag hunting took place in the arena, and this, with the sale of liquor, helped to bring in receipts of £9,500 on a five-month season. A great deal of trouble was caused by disputes among the various shareholders, while a most unfortunate accident added to the managers' difficulties: Colonel West was thrown, when riding a horse recommended to him by Hughes, and the fall reopened an old wound, from the effects of which he died. His widow became the groundlandlady, harbouring a grudge against Hughes, whom she considered responsible for her husband's death.

At the end of the season Dibdin, who had been expelled, filed a bill in Equity to ascertain his rights. After a general quarrel, Hughes unexpectedly sided with Dibdin, proposing to him to seize the theatre and open it, accounting in due course to the proprietors for their fair share. The two men took forcible possession and announced an opening on Easter Monday, 1784; but before this date a meeting took place, at which it was agreed that Dibdin and Hughes should rent the building at £1,700 per annum. They opened to good business and all went well for about five weeks, when they quarrelled about a commemoration of Arne, and Hughes took the opportunity of getting rid of his partner. Eventually Dibdin received £100 from the proprietors in liquidation of his claims.

Hughes was soon short of money, but managed to hang on in defiance of an ejectment order until January 1788, when the real proprietors—Davis, Harborne, Grant, Novosielski, Bullock and Sir John Lade—were reinstated. They in turn lost money heavily and Mrs. West claimed for ground-rent and became the possessor.

The next man to try his luck was the comedian John Palmer, who at the time was a debtor in the Kings Bench prison, which abutted on St. George's Fields. He had obtained the "Freedom of the Rules," allowing him to reside in the London Road and to accept an engagement under a Mr. Reade at the Surrey. At first he built up his popularity by delivering Stevens' "Lectures on Heads" on three nights weekly, at a salary of twelve guineas. He followed this up by playing the hero, Henry du Bois, in a melodrama called *The Bastille*, which attracted crowded houses for seventy-nine nights, until the major theatres got wind of it and closed down the Circus. The fact of Palmer's being at liberty to act, the sums he received and squandered in defiance of his creditors, caused a clause to be inserted in the next Debtors' Act, making "public houses and places of amusement" out of bounds.

The Circus remained closed from November 1789 to Easter Monday 1793, when Hughes, who had just returned from a visit to the Empress Catherine of Russia, reopened it with displays of horsemanship, rope-dancing, tumbling, balancing and "the Taylor riding to Brentford." There were at first no stage performances, but in May a Pantomime interlude was added.

In 1795, Colonel West's widow and son let the theatre for twenty-one years at 200 guineas per annum to James Jones. The following year it reopened, after alterations and the addition of a coffee-room, under the stage management of Lascelles, the

dancing-master and pantomimist. A fine company included the noted riders George Smith and Crossman, the Bolognas, father and son, and various burletta actors.

Next season the Circus company, who had been in Scotland during the winter, had also Tom Blanchard (from Covent Garden) and Mrs. Herbert. The new stage manager was John Cross, and by the end of the season the Circus had become an established theatre. In 1797 Cross married the daughter of James Jones and became part proprietor. He wrote over 40 "dumb dramas" with such promising titles as: *Louisa of Lombardy, or The Secret Avenger*, *The Fire King, or Albert and Rosalia*, *The Cloud King, or The Magic Rose*, and an equestrian pantomime *The Magic Flute*. One of the most popular was *Blackbeard*.

The Circus in those days was reached by a pleasant country walk from Westminster Bridge. A contemporary writer<sup>1</sup> has left us the following vivid account of it:

"Some short distance from the bridge we reach a toll-gate, flanked by a rough-built tavern of wood, with projecting bay-windows, looking down the famed New Cut (not the New Cut of now, but a tree-teeming, grass-growing spot of landscape that, in the present time, you might look for miles and miles away). We'll go on. More fields, more gardens, and another toll-gate, and we come upon a white-faced building with a green trellis frontage, and on its roof the figure of a rearing horse with wings—the Royal Circus (now the Surrey Theatre). We'll enter the centre door beneath the trellis, go up a small flight of stairs, and look upon a half-darkened theatre, with a large sawdust-covered ring in its centre. Pause: the place grows lighter, a thick smoke ascends from a cut in the centre of a green baize curtain; a row of oil lamps arise, and we clearly see a place of public entertainment crammed to the ceiling; a ballet dance is danced by gentlemen in short jackets and white small-clothes, assisted by ladies in red skirts and green garlands; this is followed by a drama of serious pantomimic character, aided, where the story grew dark, by written scrolls held up to the audience. For instance, 'I am thy Father,' 'Behold thy Mother,' 'Your Sister is dumb,' 'Your Brother is an idiot,' with a spirited sprinkling of attempted murder, broadsword fighting and masked music, and a wind-up of many persons on the stage, and a brilliant tableau, where the oppressed were relieved from oppression and the oppressor dealt by with true theatrical justice."

The interior was rebuilt in 1799 from Cabanel's plans, and the theatre reopened on Easter Monday with *Almorán and Hamet*. Next

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by M. Willson Disher: "Blood and Thunder," p. 58.

year it was further embellished; the performers during this season including the singers J. and G. Smith, of Drury Lane, the famous actor Wallack, and the Harlequin Byrne from Covent Garden. A "Fruiter" and "silver tickets" were instituted in 1803.

On August 12, 1805, the theatre was burned down. This disaster revealed a pleasant side to the character of John Astley, who, when he saw the glow in the sky, hurried over to the help of his rivals, saved their horses, and later offered his own Amphitheatre for a benefit in aid of the company. The loss of Pegasus was a grief to the neighbourhood, who regarded him with the same affection as modern Londoners do the Piccadilly Eros.

The insurance of £3,000 covered barely one-sixth of the loss, but a new theatre, costing £14,000, was opened on Easter Monday, 1806, with Cross as acting manager. Business was in the hands of a committee of five trustees, including James Jones, and like most committees it was unsuccessful. It came as a relief when in 1809 Robert William Elliston took the theatre for five years from March 25 at a rental of £2,100 per annum, plus £210 ground rent. It was opened on Easter Monday 1809, with a Prelude, a melodrama called *The Invisible Avenger*, and a pantomime, *Harlequin and the Witch of Ludlam*. Elliston himself appeared on June 16 as Macheath in a burletta founded on *The Beggars' Opera*, which ran for fifty nights.

As manager of the Surrey Elliston won credit by his spirited defence of the Minor theatres against the Majors. Using his burletta licence as the thin end of the wedge, he adapted a number of straight plays—among them *Macbeth*, *George Barnwell*, and *Raising the Wind*, which proved a popular innovation. As adaptations, the less said about these plays the better. His *Macbeth*, "altered from Shakespeare by Mr. Lawler," contained the following "gem":

*Is this a dagger which I see before me?  
My brains are scattered in a whirlwind stormy . . .*

In extenuation, it must be said that, after a successful season, Elliston petitioned for an extension of his licence to cover straight plays, but this was refused.

A further step towards drama and away from spectacle was made when the arena was converted into a pit and the stables into saloons. In 1810 the name was changed to Surrey Theatre and Tom Dibdin became sub-director. One or two costume melodramas were given, and then *The Beaux Stratagem*, with Elliston as Archer. A speciality of the house about this time was its "dog pieces," of

which the first was *Llewellyn*, written by Cherry and finished after his death by Tom Dibdin. So great an attraction were the dogs, Gelert and Victor, that a special time of day was set aside for the public to visit their kennels.

Elliston did well, but as he had great initial expenses to cover he extended the season from six months to ten, which was longer than the drawing-power of the theatre justified. The new pit was too large for the available audience and remained dismally half-empty. By 1814, when he left to become manager of Drury Lane, he had lost considerably. Pieces staged by him during this first period include, besides those mentioned above: *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, *The Honey Moon*, *London Haunts*, *The Children in the Wood*, *Maloney Mayor of Garrett*, *High Life Below Stairs*, *Silvester Daggerwood*, *The Son-in-Law*, *The Blind Boy*, etc.

Now that Elliston was identified with the "Majors" it was seen that his championship of the "Minors" had been a matter of expediency and not a crusade; for he immediately swung round and became a staunch upholder of the Patent Theatres. He was not a popular or estimable character; judging by the amazingly frank remarks in Oxberry's "Dramatic Biographies"—written, apparently, before the days of libel actions:

"Of Mr. Elliston's private life one must say but little, for it is difficult to describe hemlock without expatiating upon poison. We believe, in the whole range of drama, there is no one who speaks well of Mr. Elliston."

For the remaining two years of Jones's term the theatre was hired by a triumvirate consisting of Mr. Dunn, a member of the back-stage staff, Mr. Branscomb, landlord of the Circus coffee-house, and a Mr. Heywood. Very soon Branscomb died, Heywood was bankrupted, and Dunn became sole arbiter. He turned the place back into a Circus and let it fall into such disrepute that "the Dog and Duck and the Apollo Gardens would have been reckoned genteel places compared with it." When obliged to quit, Dunn carried off all the fittings that he could take, and on March 21, 1816, auctioned the rest, together with eight or nine horses.

After this disastrous interregnum, the theatre was reopened on July 1, 1816, by Dibdin, at the reduced rental of £1,000 per annum. Under the new agreement, however, the ground-landlady took one-third of the profits, and the lessee had to spend £4,000 on repairs and to insure at the rate of £360.

The programme consisted of *A Housewarming*, with an Occasional

Address; *The Sicilian*, and *Chevy Chase*. A new pit had been built, the house embellished and a select band installed. There were free admissions, a fruit-room, private boxes and other amenities.

After four years of dog-dramas and historical pieces, Dibdin ceded the licence to a Mr. Watkyns Burroughs, who failed and went to America. His successor was Mr. Williams, under whose régime the theatre exhibited, in a drama founded on the Weare case, the original gig and sofa used by the murderer Thurtell. About this date some severe remarks were made by *The Times* concerning the management (August 29, 1823).

"They are beset, we perceive, with one aim—common to all the managers on the Surrey side the water—that of employing their capital with very little taste or discretion. All the money goes to the machinist and the red-fire-monger. They spend £1,000 or £2,000 in fitting up and ornamenting a theatre, and then buy plays at 30s. a dozen to represent in it. Five or ten pounds for the writing of a piece, and £200 or £300, perhaps, for the gilding about of it—a practice as reasonable as it would be to put embroidery on a soot-bag.

"Here is the Surrey Theatre, for instance, very neatly and creditably appointed; and if the idle boys were kept away from about the doors, and the money-takers would shave themselves, it is such a place as people might go into; but then, with all this expense as to dress and decoration, the dramatic part is so deficient that even the St. George's fields critics take objection to it. We really saw a spruce beer-shop man last night at the Surrey Theatre shake his head at something which they call *Antigone* . . . We think that minor dramatists should keep clear of ancient Greece and Rome. 'What's Hecuba to them, or they to Hecuba?' Certainly the race at present inditing will be more secure of being correct if they stick to this side the Norman Conquest."

The strictures about extravagant mounting of pieces bring to mind Fitzball's note that the Surrey was decorated with gold and velvet—"a Genoa velvet curtain covering the stage." (Presumably, an act-drop.)

In June 1827 Elliston came back, remaining at the Surrey until his death in 1831. Under his management appeared the delightful Mrs. Fitzwilliam, whose smile (says Oxberry) "was worth crossing Blackfriars on a snowy night, just to sun in for an instant." Less poetically, the *Theatrical Times* notes: "She is rather short and

stout, and her face, though not beautiful, is pleasing." She starred in the opera *Sylvana* (1828), supported by Mr. Phillips and Miss Graddon. With *Black-Ey'd Susan*, in the following year, the Surrey scored a smash-hit. T. P. Cooke was so popular as its sailor hero that he found himself typed for many years to come.

After Elliston's death the theatre reverted to his son Charles, but in a few months he passed it on to Francis Osbaldiston. From 1833 onwards the house was run by G. B. Davidge, who produced at least two highly successful pieces—*Jonathan Bradford* and *My Poll and my Partner Joe*. In the latter, Arthur Dillon created the rôle of Black Brandon.

After Davidge's death in 1842 his widow kept on the theatre for several years, and it was during her lesseeship that Alfred Bunn, the celebrated Drury Lane manager, made various experiments there, between September 1847 and February 1848, of which Fitzball remarks: "Mr. Bunn, the best manager in my time, was as much out of his element at the Surrey as a mouse would be in an aquarium."

During 1848 the Surrey was embellished and partly rebuilt, and in December of that year Osbaldiston and Shepherd became joint lessees; the former then went back to the Victoria and Creswick became Shepherd's partner. In 1863 James Anderson took over from Creswick.

Then came one of those disasters that were so frequent in the nineteenth century, when open gas-jets were so near to the inflammable materials on stage. On January 30, 1865, the last scene of the pantomime *Harlequin King Pippin* was in progress, when the Clown Rowella noticed that the ceiling was ablaze. He warned the stage manager, Mr. Green, who lowered the curtain, stepped out in front of it, and asked the audience to leave quietly. When flames and smoke burst through the dome above the chandelier and flakes of burning canvas began to shower over the pit and gallery, there was some panic and crowding, but fortunately no lives were lost.

The men of the company behaved with great bravery and presence of mind. Huntley, the engineer, turned the gas off at the main—averting an explosion but incidentally plunging the stage into darkness—while Green, Rowella, and Evans, the Pantaloon, took the lead in dragging out the ballet girls and children. The unfortunate girls, half-naked in their gauzy dresses, stood shivering and crying in the slush and sleet, until they were given shelter in neighbouring houses or driven home in cabs.

An enquiry established that the fire was probably due to gas escaping from the chandelier. Of the estimated loss of £12,000 barely one-sixth was covered by insurance.

The new building, which became in due course the beloved Surrey of the Conquests, known to thousands of Londoners during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was opened on Boxing Night 1865, with a pantomime: *King Chess, or Tom the Piper's Son*. Constructed by C. M. Foster of Whitefriars from the designs of John Ellis, this theatre covered a site representing an irregular pentagon, about 200 feet in its largest diameter and 100 feet in width. The main entrance, in the Blackfriars Road, had an Ionic portico, sixty-two feet wide, with three doors, the centre leading to the box-entrance lobby by a stone staircase with ornamental iron balustrades, the right-hand door to the pit, level with the roadway, and the left-hand to the gallery by a stone staircase seven feet wide.

The auditorium was in horseshoe form, measuring sixty-eight feet from the curtain to the back wall of the pit, and sixty-two feet in width. Two rows of stalls were separated from the pit, ten feet above which was the dress-circle. Two tiers of boxes rested on iron columns, the fronts of the boxes and gallery being ornamented with medallions and wreaths. A sky-blue dome was picked out in gold and delicate colours upon the coffered groundwork, and the entablature round its base had venetian-red panels inscribed with the names of dramatists.

A special feature was the size of the stage, sixty feet deep and seventy wide, with a further fifteen feet of "scene docks" on either side, making a hundred feet of working-room. It was this spaciousness that allowed of the remarkable scenic effects in the melodramas.

In the early days of the new theatre, Avonia Jones, widow of Gustavus Brooke, played the heroine in *East Lynne*. A pathetic incident took place, when the actor's last message, written as he awaited death on the deck of the sinking *London* and thrown overboard in a bottle, was washed ashore and brought to her at the theatre.

Between 1869 and 1873 the Surrey changed hands with bewildering rapidity. Creswick and Shepherd retired in September 1869, and Mrs. Charles Pitt took over from them. She presented Madame Celeste in *The Watch-Dog of the Walsinghams*—one of the

special mime rôles that were written for this attractive actress, owing to her limited command of English.

Others who came, saw, and . . . failed, were A. G. Shelley (Easter 1870) and E. T. Smith (October 1870). For a brief spell, in September 1871, Shepherd took over again, though not in his own name; then Miss Virginia Blackwood tried her luck for about six months, handing over to William Holland at Christmas 1873.

Holland, who also ran the North Woolwich Pleasure Gardens, was known as "The People's Caterer." The cartoonists revelled in his moustache—a masterpiece in wax with quills fully six inches long. On one occasion he "brought the house down" at a pantomime by appearing suddenly through a trap, in place of the Fairy Queen, and addressing the audience with what must surely take a booby prize for puns:

*Surrounded here by all things light and airy,  
Please to imagine me a little fairy.  
A fairy with a moustache you won't be hard on:  
Well, if you are, I must ask your pardon.*

Moustache apart, however, Holland did good work in building up the Surrey as a pantomime house. He had a reputation for being open-handed and always ready to do a good turn, and the rumour of his difficulties at the beginning of 1881 brought him plenty of sympathy. Later in the year it was found that he was in debt to the tune of £10,000.

In January 1881, Holland had an unpleasant experience, when one of his pantomime writers, J. F. McArdle—being drunk and labouring under some grievance about alterations made to his script—waved a pistol in his face. George Conquest, hearing about the affair, made one of his typically practical comments: "It's a great pity he didn't wound you, Bill. What a splendid Benefit you could have got out of it!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### *"For Ever"*

INEXPERIENCED theatre managers are apt to fire off their biggest guns at the start, only to run out of ammunition halfway through their first season; but George Conquest was far too old a hand to make this mistake. He launched his campaign quietly with a drama of the American backwoods, *The Danites*, which had already done good business at Sadler's Wells and the old Garrick.

During the three months that the theatre had remained closed it had been smartened up, painted and decorated. A new act-drop, by Richard Douglass, showed Richmond Bridge, with distant villas and parkland reflected in the glittering Thames.

In mid-August George presented another tested favourite—Meritt's play *The New Babylon*, which, scheduled to last a fortnight, carried through to the beginning of October. By this time George felt sure of his audience and ready to launch an ambitious new drama—*Mankind*.

This play—wittily summarised by Punch as "A Conquest with Meritt"—contained a first-rate acting part for George himself, as the miser Daniel Groodge. He took his opportunity to the full, giving a performance that was remembered for many years. Distilling the essence of press notices assembled in an advertisement, we learn that this inimitable and forceful impersonation, acted with genuine dramatic vigour, artistic skill and intensity of power, was one of the best things George Conquest had ever given his public. It possessed the sovereign quality of imagination, with numberless artistic touches. Splendid, masterly, weird and terrible, this highly finished acting would certainly fetch the town. One paper went so far as to call it "one of the finest pieces of realistic acting ever seen." Making all allowances for a deft sifting of compliments by those responsible for the advertisement, there is no doubt that Conquest's Daniel Groodge was an outstanding piece of work.

Particularly clever was the way in which he utilised and exaggerated his lameness, as appears from a notice in the *Illustrated London News*:

"He here represents a shambling old greybeard, a spiteful hard-fisted miser, whose very eccentricities are in themselves comic. I have seldom seen such comic legs on any comedian. An enthusiastic young lady is said to have declared that the left leg of a certain fashionable tragedian was a poem! Mr. George Conquest's left leg is about the funniest farce I have ever seen, and his hurrying walk off as quaint as anything Mr. John S. Clarke did in *The Toodles*."

Evidently the reviewer was completely taken in, for no one would be so ill-mannered as to call attention to an actor's physical defect, unless he believed it to be assumed as a "character" touch.

The plot—incredibly complicated, like that of most melodramas—has been amusingly summarised by G. A. Sala:

"Messrs. George Conquest and Paul Meritt concocted a kind of sensational bouillabaisse containing all kinds of strange fishes. The recipe for the ingenious medley might run practically thus: 'Take a witches' cauldron and set it over a blue fire; strangle a disreputable junior partner of a money-lender and throw into the pot; hang the other money-lender for murdering his colleague and throw him in likewise; half drown a virtuous young married lady and in with her; beat a small clever child in black stockings very hard to make her tender, and pop her in; add a cup of coffee, well poisoned; flavour with a stolen will, a Chubb burglar-proof safe, several forgeries, a good deal of genial humour, an old woman's gingham umbrella, some seaweed from Ramsgate sands, some gravel from a garden on the Thames Embankment, a rasher of bacon from a coffee tavern, a quartern of gin, a Gladstone bag, a small quantity of blood, a pinch of gunpowder, and any amount of vigorous acting, and then you have your bouillabaisse—*Mankind*. Make the gruel very thick and slab and serve very hot."

The "strangling scene" referred to in this paragraph was a highlight of the play and was reproduced many times by itself at benefit performances.

So successful was *Mankind* that it was taken to the Globe in the following spring, with the handsome Kyrle Bellew as hero. In the boating scene he met with an accident, and a cartoon in *Entr'acte* shows him—arm in sling, patch over eye, and sticking-plastered face—with George Conquest, that tough veteran remarking unsympathetically: "There, don't make such a hullabellaw about it! It's nothing when you're used to it!"

If George did take this attitude, it was with every right, for during his acrobatic career he had met with more accidents than any other performer who survived to tell of them. In an interview

given in 1884 he confessed to having broken his nose twice, dislocated his knees over twenty-five times, injured his ankles and spine (on one occasion remaining paralysed for four months), broken ribs and collarbone and dislocated his fingers. Besides the main damage to his leg in America, he also dislocated his ankle and broke his left wrist and his big toe. A year or two later, when he broke his shoulder-blade in the pantomime *Sindbad*, he reckoned it as his eleventh major accident.

Once fairly settled down in the Surrey theatre, “the Governor” ran it with a rhythmic routine that lasted for the rest of his life. It was organised on different lines from the multifarious Grecian, with its open-air entertainments and music-hall as adjuncts. The Surrey mounted a pantomime on Boxing Day which lasted well into the spring, following it by a season of melodramas and curtain-raiser farces until June, when the stock company went out on tour and the theatre was let to travelling companies for the next few weeks. On August Bank Holiday the Conquest troupe came back again, usually opening with a revival and keeping their main play of the season until late September or October, when it would sometimes last almost up to the pantomime.

The stock company gave young players the training that is now started by the drama schools and completed by country repertories. They would stay in the company for years, graduating through different types of part as their experience increased. George had the rare gift of combining strict stage discipline with a “happy family” atmosphere: his players could have all the fun they wanted in their free time, provided their work did not suffer. There was no “star” system: each player had a fair living wage, but £5 was his limit. If an ambitious young actor asked for more, he would say: “Good-bye, my lad—and good luck in the West End!” An apparent exception was the joint salary of £20 offered to Dan Leno and his wife when he engaged them for pantomime; but in doing this he was in fact carrying out an old stage custom, by which salaries were doubled while the pantomime was running.

George reckoned that he saved something like £2,000 a year by having properties made on the spot. His classic comment on the lavish Drury Lane spectacles was: “If Augustus Harris wants a steam-engine he buys a steam-engine—I look round the theatre for a few tables and paint the tops like wheels.”

The play that opened on October 2, 1882—*For Ever*—is worth discussing in detail, as it embodies the quintessence of all melodramas: whether taken seriously or as a joke, it was talked about for years. It was parodied in a skit by Matthison called *More Than Ever*, played at the Gaiety with Harry Monkhouse in one of the main parts; but this was a case where parody fell short of its model.

*For Ever* had seven acts and on its first night played for nearly five hours. By the beginning of November it had been curtailed to last *only* from seven-thirty to eleven o'clock. One suspects that the house must have sympathised with the heroine when, in the last few minutes of Act VII, she sighed: "I feel the end is drawing close, very close—and then I shall be at rest!"

The act-headings give a good idea of its contents:

- Act I: The Village Fair. "In the midst of Life . . ."
- Act II: 1. Chamber at Daremount Manor. A new Lucrezia Borgia.  
2. Assize Courts. The Sentence.
- Act III: The Daremount Arms. "Risen from the Dead."
- Act IV: Rockley House: Devil's Wages.
- Act V: 1. Outside the Restaurant. The Catspaw.  
2. The Restaurant. Mad! Mad! Mad!
- Act VI: Rockley's. The Bride of Death.
- Act VII The Warren. For Ever and Ever.

Thus the manuscript in the Lord Chamberlain's office; but the programme has still more alluring titles for the last two acts:

- Act VI: The Nook. "Until Death do us Part."
- Act VII: The Warren. Grand Panoramic Effect of Moving Streets and Houses. Eternity!!!

(Exclamation marks as originally printed.)

A further alteration is in the name of the Man-Monkey who is the king-pin of the piece: originally called "Zachariah Youdell," he becomes "*Zacky Pastrana*"—perhaps because George Conquest recalled his first starring rôle as "Pastrano Nonsuch" in *Peter Wilkins*.

The plot has defeated most people who have tried to describe it. There are, in fact, four interwoven threads of action: the murder of Sir Philip Daremount by his steward Abel Rockley and the latter's daughter Ruth; the troubles of Sir Philip's son Jasper, who is estranged from his secretly-married wife Phyllis and dispossessed by his cousin Julian; the mystery of Phyllis's parentage (her father is not really the coiner Hackman, but "a respectable City goldsmith"); and finally, the love of Zacky for Ruth.

Here, as briefly as possible (neglecting the sub-plot of Phyllis and Hackman), is the story:

“Abel Rockley, with Julian’s connivance, has been robbing his master for years. Sir Philip, finding this out, selects the village fairground as a suitable spot for accusing him. At the fair, Zacky Pastrana, deputising for the lion-tamer in a costume consisting of ‘the head-dress of an Indian chief, the chain shirt of Richard III, the shield of Julius Caesar, the boots of Charles II, his own trousers, and the sword of a Dragoon,’ is mauled by the lion—who objects to the trousers!

“Sir Philip compassionately has him sent to Daremount Hall for treatment. Rockley engineers an accident at the shooting-booth in which Sir Philip is wounded, but not fatally.

“The Baronet is nursed by his ward Phyllis and by Ruth Rockley, who is slowly poisoning him at the instigation of her lover Julian. Having led the doctor to suspect Phyllis she administers a fatal dose, leaving Phyllis’ scarf in the dead man’s hand. She accidentally locks herself into the room, but Zacky, who climbs like a monkey, carries her down the ivy. He has peered in and seen enough to exonerate Phyllis and inculcate Ruth; being in love with the latter, however, he holds his tongue.

“He himself, having received as a token from Ruth a diamond ring which she has stolen from Sir Philip’s room, is put on trial with Phyllis as an accessory to the murder. Both are acquitted (because the jar with the entrails has fallen into a stream and been washed clean of poison!); but Zacky—‘by a process unknown to British Law,’ comments one critic, remembering that the trial is to find the murderer of Sir Philip—is given a seven-year sentence for stealing the ring. He reminds Ruth that he is suffering for her sake and will come back to claim her ‘for ever.’

“Meanwhile, Julian has stolen some papers proving Jasper’s identity, dispossessed him and succeeded to his uncle’s estates. Jasper, though he has refused to give evidence against Phyllis, his secret wife, believes her guilty and rejects her.

“Released on a ticket-of-leave, Zacky turns up as a rich man (having inherited some unexpectedly fruitful mining shares), and Abel Rockley persuades Ruth—in her rage at being deserted by Julian—to marry him. She reluctantly goes through the ceremony, arranges to meet Zacky in a restaurant, and then sends him a note saying that she has left him; whereupon (as Sala quaintly remarks) ‘he goes stark, staring mad, in a blue bodycoat with gilt buttons, and a white waistcoat.’ He escapes from an asylum, finds Ruth at her father’s house, and cuts her throat.

“The last act reunites all the surviving characters in a house by a pond—mainly so that Phyllis shall fall in and be rescued and

forgiven by her husband. Jasper's papers are recovered from Julian; while Zacky is chased up to the roof, falls over, and crawls back dying, to declare that he is going to join Ruth 'for ever and ever.'"

This sounds a farrago of nonsense, but it is in fact a first-rate melodrama. The bustle of the fairground scene; the elaborate setting of Daremount Hall, complete with secret panels and ivied casements; the contrast of the Assizes and the Restaurant (into which latter scene a good deal of brisk comedy is injected) and the action-packed dénouement, do much to cover its inherent improbabilities.

The play as a whole stands or falls by the character of Zacky Pastrana.

"But who is Zacky Pastrana?" asks Sala. "It is necessary to state, in reply, that Zachariah Pastrana is Mr. George Conquest, to begin with, and a 'monkey-man' afterwards. His mamma, it is delicately hinted, was 'frightened,' and her offspring is an astonishing amalgamation of Quilp, Quasimodo, Caliban, Riquet with the Tuft, and Hans of Iceland, with a gorilla, an orang-outang, a chimpanzee, the great blue-faced baboon of Java, and Rumpelstiltskin in the fairy tale of the Brothers Grimm."

Conquest, who had recovered much of his agility, played the part with a zest that can be imagined, climbing in and out of windows and swinging up walls and roofs in simian style. "He displays a wonderful amount of nervous energy," says *Entr'acte*, "and his acting throughout is of a thorough and earnest order." It certainly appealed to his audience, whom Sala describes as interested "even to agony point."

The Captious Critic of *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic*, while giving a graphic picture (illustrated by line-sketches) of the said audience, was less sure of their reactions:

"These young gentlemen from the neighbouring localities have a style of evening dress which is airy and unique; rows upon rows of these young gentlemen lean, naked-elbowed, upon each other, greedily drinking in the thrilling incidents proceeding upon the stage for their delectation. They crack nuts and crack jokes, they whistle and shout. . . . These youthful votaries of the drama must be rare enthusiasts, for they were wedged together in a stifling atmosphere for over five hours. Whether they were elated with the efforts of Mr. Conquest and his company to entertain them, I can hardly say, for their ways of expressing their approval or dislike

are peculiarly their own. I am, however, inclined to imagine that the general verdict amongst them took somewhat of the form of derision rather than delight.”

Melodrama had, in fact, on this occasion been carried to the border-line of the absurd. As *The Era* said, commenting on Zacky’s “mad scene”:

“A monkey in love cuts but a sorry figure, and the audience could only laugh, when probably they were expected to sympathise. In those scenes where Mr. Conquest had to depict Zacky’s ferocity and strength of will, he created a remarkable impression; but the ‘raving mad’ scene, although played with undeniable power, fell far short of the effect intended. The surroundings were against the actor. A man-monkey, stamping, roaring, raving and seeing lions and leopards where none exist, with waiters, dancers, soup-plates, champagne bottles and a band of music in the background, is, it appears to us, as much out of place—just as mischievous and far more ridiculous—as the proverbial bull in a china shop.”

Chance Newton (“Carados”) relates an amusing anecdote of the first performance. The popular Algernon Syms—a frank, blue-eyed Devonian—was playing Jasper. When he was asked to account for his movements at the time of Sir Philip’s death, first-night nerves tangled his tongue, and he raised a laugh by declaring that he was “not near the scene of the murder, for he had passed the room in a little night on the stairs.”

*For Ever* ran for several weeks, but was taken off early in December, probably to give George Conquest a rest while he produced the Pantomime. It was succeeded by a version of *Jane Eyre*, evidently hurriedly compiled and below the usual Surrey standard. About this, too, *The Era* had some cutting things to say:

“Miss Lizzie Claremont, as the maniac wife, worked hard enough, but it cannot be said she was impressive. She seemed to have a curious idea of her responsibilities, for, taking a call before the curtains at the end of the first act, she still thought it necessary to keep up the character, and so, with the curtain down, was seen crossing the stage, gesticulating wildly.

“Mr. C. Cruikshanks” (the comedy man) “did not meet the requirements of the part of the Rev. Mr. Brocklehurst, but the ‘gods’ seemed greatly to appreciate his silly singing of a verse from ‘The Village Blacksmith.’”

## THE SURREY

From this time onwards the Surrey ranked as one of the leading melodrama houses in London, taking second place only to the Lyceum. During the twenty years of George Conquest's management, if it never again reached the heights (or plumbed the depths) of *For Ever*, at least it kept up a steady stream of new plays, took over the West End successes, and revived old favourites from the Grecian.

Pride of place was held by *Driven from Home*—presented almost yearly between 1893 and 1898, with George's niece, Cissy Farrell, playing the boy hero. Its success was largely due to the realistic mounting of a saw-mill scene, where the lad Walter Hatherleigh, stunned by a fellow-workman, is laid in the track of a circular saw and snatched out of danger by a half-witted outcast "when the saw has commenced to part his back hair down the middle." We are told that "female shrieks, loud and long," accompanied this scene. Cissy Farrell also played the lead in a Grecian revival—*The Angel of Death*—which surprised the critics by filling the house when they considered it quite out of fashion. *The Black Flag*, which took its title from the signal hoisted when a convict escaped from Portland, and *The Green Lanes of England*—far less tranquil than its rural sound implies—also proved popular enough to be revived more than once at the Surrey.

West End melodramas played here included: *Arrah-na-Pogue*, *Drink*, *Hoodman Blind*, *It's Never Too Late to Mend* (for which William Archer, leaving it half-finished at 11 p.m., coined the Shulmanism "*It's Never Too Late to End*"), *The Lights o' London*, *Old London* (*Jack Sheppard* renamed), and *The Silver King*.

Many of the new dramas produced at the Surrey had George Conquest as part-author. He collaborated not only with Paul Meritt, but also with younger authors, such as Miss Tinsley (*Devil's Luck*, or *The Man She Loved*), George Comer (*Dead Beat*), Tom Craven (*The Village Forge*), Arthur Shirley (*Phantoms*, *The Work Girl*, *A Tale of the Thames*), and St. Aubyn Miller (*The Winning Hand*). Most of these men also wrote independently, or in collaboration with one another.

Popular plays were written by F. A. Scudamore (*The Dangers of London*, *Rags and Bones*, *Is Life worth Living? Against the Tide*, etc.); Benjamin Landeck (*To Call Her Mine*, and, with Arthur Shirley, *Midnight*, or *The Bells of Notre Dame* and *A Daughter's Honour*); and Herbert Leonard, the stage manager, who contributed some dramas in stirringly patriotic vein, such as *Serving the Queen*, *On Active Service* and *The Fighting Fifth*.

## “FOR EVER”

Comparing titles with those of the Grecian plays, one notices a distinct slide in the social scale, and a gravitation towards modernity and English settings: Princesses, Dukes, Buccaneers, Châteaux and Angels have for the most part been abandoned in favour of such workaday subjects as *Capital and Labour*, *How London Lives*, *In the Ranks*, *Master and Man*, *The Work Girl*, *Tommy Atkins*. There is quite a bit of crime, but no longer dressed in such guise as *Seven Sins*, or *Passion's Paradise*. (This, by the way, is a most moral and straightforward “whodunit,” about the murder of a miser and the efforts of the murderer's daughter to shield her father by a false confession.)

In a masterly essay<sup>1</sup> William Archer has discussed the value of these melodramas as theatre. He deals at some length with W. S. Gilbert's sarcastic attack:

“It is easy to write an original play that shall succeed. Every play which contains a house on fire, a sinking steamer, a railway accident, and a dance in a casino, will (if it is liberally placed on the stage) succeed in spite of itself. In point of fact, nothing could wreck such a piece but carefully written dialogue and strict attention to probability. Avoid these two stumbling-blocks (and nothing is easier than to avoid them), and your piece will succeed triumphantly.”

Archer points out that this is unfair. The dialogue of melodrama may not be good literature, but it has pith and point. As for probability, the art of the writer is not to throw it overboard altogether, but “to render probable the improbable”:

“The dramatist may give his hero as many lives as a cat; he may override gravitation, rearrange astronomy, and construct a geography of his own; he may snap his fingers at laws, physical, chemical, or psychological; he may do all this, so long as he does it in such a manner that his audience shall for the moment overlook or excuse his revision of the universe.”

He concludes that melodrama has its justification in an irrepressible demand from that section of the British lower-middle classes which draws its ideas from a study of the “crimes and disasters” in the Sunday papers: “In short, it is a necessary outgrowth of modern English life, and not in its way an unworthy one.”

<sup>1</sup> “English Dramatists of Today,” 1882. (Chapter on Paul Mcritt.)

Even audiences of a higher culture can, he thinks, derive considerable enjoyment from this type of play:

"To anyone with a sense of humour the scenic effects afford an inexhaustible store of amusement—pasteboard racehorses careering in wild jerks along the farthest groove, boats sailing gallantly away with their sails flapping against the mast, steamboats exploding with the measured deliberation of well-regulated clockwork. As for the 'barons and squires and knights of the shires' who wander through these remarkable productions, they are irresistibly comic."

While on this subject it is only fair to comment that the scenic effects at the minor theatres were by no means all of the kind described above. John Douglass, of the Standard (son of the elder Douglass whom we have mentioned in connection with the Marylebone), once staged a race with real horses, which were cantered outside the theatre, galloped at full speed through the scene-dock and across the stage, and pulled up in an alley beyond, while a friendly constable halted the traffic. The Standard, the Surrey, the Pavilion and the Britannia had a working agreement by which they exchanged plays, thus sharing the expenses of elaborate sets—such as the saw-mill, a paddle-steamer passing under a practicable bridge, and aquatic scenes with "tanks" of real water.

Of Paul Meritt himself, Archer suggests that he had a talent fit for better things:

"He might have been a dramatist and he has elected to be a play-carpenter. He has proved himself wise—or fortunate, in his generation."

Pettitt, too, took this practical standpoint. He used to say frankly: "Let those who choose to work for fame do so, but I want my pieces to bring me success while I live." He had not only a gift for contriving effective situations, but so thorough a knowledge of the public taste that he never made a mistake in laying his bait. When he died at the comparatively early age of forty-five, his fortune was reckoned at £40,000. He was, says Chance Newton who knew him well, "a noble-hearted utterly unselfish fellow and friend." Strangely enough, Meritt and Pettitt, who collaborated so often and whose careers took such a similar course, died within a year or two of each other and are both buried in Brompton Cemetery, barely a hundred yards apart.

George Conquest shared the views of his fellow-dramatists. When discussing his policy with a journalist on the occasion of the opening of the new Grecian theatre in 1877, he declared that he

did not intend to be carried away by any flights of fancy or ambition from the beaten track in which he had made his fortune and the reputation of his establishment. His patrons called for strong melodrama, and that was what he gave them. Their villain must be a real one, their hero must be qualified to overcome all obstacles, moral and physical, their funny man must be funny in their own way . . . and so on, through the rest of the characters in successive plays, all of whom bore a marked family likeness.

\*

A spontaneous tribute to the Conquest melodramas was paid by a white-haired Surrey-sider who helped the author to find the site of the theatre. When he spoke of it, the old man's face lit up, as though he were talking of a dear and well-remembered friend: "We used to go there every week when I was a boy," he said, and then added, as if in explanation: "You see, Miss, there weren't any Pictures then."

Perhaps the best justification of melodrama is that—even in these days of "pictures"—when the managers of the Bedford theatre recently revived one of these plays as a joke, they found to their surprise that there was still a public who could enjoy it in the spirit in which it was written.

## CHAPTER XV

### *Surrey Pantomime*

WHEN the time came to present his first pantomime at the Surrey, George Conquest was faced with a problem: he had a two-fold reputation to sustain—that of the theatre as a first-rate pantomime house, and that of his own successes at the Grecian. Yet not only was he himself finished as an acrobat, but for the first time in thirty years there would be no Conquest in the cast.

George the younger was at Alexandra Palace, producing *Hop o' my Thumb*, in which he was playing the Giant Ogreiferous. In any case, if accident had grounded the father, Nature was doing the same for the son. Amid the Conquests' tiny girls and short, spare men, George was a phenomenon. He took after his uncle, Ozmond the 'Turkish Jew—one of the heaviest Harlequins on record. Young George stood a head taller than his father, and his large frame quickly built up flesh. In his teens he had been wiry and a good athlete, but once he had turned twenty it became increasingly evident that he was safer on the ground. With true Conquest realism he gave up "phantom flights" and became one of the most convincing Giants in the pantomime world. The odd thing was, he never lost his footwork—it was uncanny to see this huge man dancing as nimbly and airily as any six-stone ballet-girl.

The younger boys, Fred and Arthur, had their father's trim figure and promised well—but they were still too young, as were the Dyson and Farrell children, who later became such useful members of the stock company; so George had to depend upon outside talent.

It must be remembered, too, that George had lost a great deal of money by his American venture; not only the actual outlay of the journey (though that was heavy enough), but the loss of earnings through cancelled contracts and the months of forced inaction that followed his accident.

With all these disadvantages, he produced a pantomime that lived up to the reputation of the house. It had the comprehensive title: *Mother Bunch, or the Man with the Hunch; or the Reeds, the Weeds,*

*the Priest, the Swell, the Gipsy Girl and the Big Dumb Bell.* The story (though Victor Hugo might have failed to realise it) was vaguely based upon "Notre Dame de Paris," with Cruikshanks as "Squashimodus" (Quasimodo) and Macdermott as Claude Frolico.

In an unusual opening scene, the four nursery-rhyme "Mothers"—Hubbard, Bunch, Goose and Shipton—sit together in a "weedy waste" in Surrey, planning a subject for the pantomime. At Mother Goose's suggestion they consult the Red Elves—a group of boys who repeat various nursery rhymes in chorus, turning round at the end of each, so that the single letters on each boy's back spell out the title (Bo-Peep, Jack and Jill, etc.). Mother Bunch decides that they are all hackneyed: she calls in Novelty, who puts her library at their disposal. The books open, and from their pages step costumed figures: Aladdin, Henry VIII, Guy Fawkes, Bluebeard, the Yellow Dwarf—until finally Esmeralda is chosen.

Compensating for the lack of acrobatics, there was plenty to delight the eye. A ballet in the floral home of Mother Bunch displayed white-clad dancers, their skirts decked with bright green leaves and silver spangles, building up to a final tableau in which Chinese umbrellas were lowered, showering down roses, violets, carnations and marigolds upon the dancing girls.

Even more gorgeous was the Transformation Scene, when Esmeralda became the Princess Charming. The scenery sank, leaving a grand centre of jewels surrounded by festoons of gilded foliage. From the flies hung a pendant of precious stones, behind which a fan sank and rose, each time revealing fresh beauties. Upon a second fan were posed lovely girls in gold, silver and white, standing upon silver battlements supported by gleaming pillars.

By the following year (1882) George had been able to train a couple of young acrobats to use the vampire traps, and once again his pantomime boasted a "phantom flight." He had, too, the assistance of his son as a realistic giant:

"His mask—so well arranged that the mouth moves naturally as he speaks, and the forehead is creased, and the eyes close in slumber or wink with mischief—is only equalled by his wonderful legs, which can perform a step-dance or cross themselves in careless nonchalance, as if they were the actor's actual limbs."

The pantomime, *Puss in Boots*, was on classic lines, representing the struggle of good and evil spirits (the Cats and Rats, respectively) to help or hinder Jack, his widowed Mother and his attendant Puss. With the gay inconsequence proper to these spectacles, the

Transformation Scene assembled the Seven Champions of Christendom—each with his attendant soldiers; the Grenadiers, Highlanders and Naval Brigade, massed in a grand display of patriotic songs, rifle and bayonet manœuvres.

Thanks to A. E. Wilson, who kindly lent us one of the few surviving “books”—that of *Jack and Jill* (1883)—we can form an idea of the text of these pantomimes which for forty years George Conquest and Henry Spry turned out in collaboration. Its basis was the pun, ranging from simple assonance (‘To *shun* such *facts* would give me *satisfacts*’; even on *Princes Falsehood prints his mark*); through association of ideas (I’m mild as *milk*, that’s if I have my *way*); to recondite literary allusions:

*I thought to blow up the Bridges—the Thames over,  
And settle Shakespeare’s Cliff that stands at Dover,  
But the old fellow’s occupation’s gone.*

One wonders what the Transpontine audience made of this, or of the parody of Hamlet’s lines to Ophelia:

*Doubt newspaper telegrams of foreign news,  
Doubt Jack and Jill will everyone amuse,  
Doubt pit and boxes, doubt the “gods” above,  
Doubt all these things, but never doubt I love.*

(They show, incidentally, how thoroughly George Conquest was steeped in Shakespeare.)

Some of these puns were neatly allusive, such as the following (from *The Yellow Dwarf*):

What, deprive him of his *tit-bits*! That’s a blunder.  
What will his *Answers* be to that, I wonder?

some were incredibly bad:

*Paul*: Take some *magnesia*, Ma’am, nice cooling stuff.

*Dame*: I think I’m quite *magnesiaphant* enough.

*Carrot*: But now observe a simple vegetarian,  
I rule *scarlet runners* not *human beans*.

The matter of *Jack and Jill* was not outstanding, though it had a revival of the “Demon Oak” by George the younger. Its prettiest effect was a representation of various jewels—gold, silver, copper, sapphires, rubies, emeralds and diamonds, with limelight playing upon them. This pleased the audience so much that they did not

stop applauding until George Conquest took a call before the footlights.

There is little to note about the next two pantomimes—*Aladdin* (1884) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1885)—but *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1886) was the piece which introduced Dan Leno to the London stage. Leno played Dame Durden, and his wife (Lydia Reynolds) was Mercury. He had good notices, but nothing which suggested that within ten years he would be the greatest pantomimist of his time.

The next pantomime, *Sindbad*, is worthy of record for several reasons; but mainly because it was the only Surrey pantomime in which George Conquest appeared personally, though he continued to write and produce them. Here is an abridgment of *The Era's* account:

“Mr. Conquest has never produced a better pantomime than *Sindbad*. It is good in every way—in the story, the setting, the scenery, the weird effects, the music, the dancing and the fun. It is full of life and spirit, and of contrast and variety. It is an old-fashioned pantomime in the best sense, for it realises in the most picturesque and attractive manner all that the imagination conjures up in reading the original story. Mr. Conquest is never at a loss in inventive power, and many of the strange creations he has presented on the stage live in the memory as the most striking and effective figures ever introduced in pantomime.

“The Little Old Man of the Sea is fished up by the hero, who lands a strange-looking jar instead of a fish. But there is a queer fish inside, for Mr. Conquest emerges from the jar, and, in spite of his ungainly appearance, begins to make love to the fair Aminé. When this is resented, the Old Man disappears with a suddenness that astonishes all. Waving a cloak around him, he flies, and when they attempt to seize him, he is gone. This mysterious disappearance was managed with the utmost skill.

“Splendid effects were created in the Wreck scene, when the ship comes into collision with a whale. The Old Man of the Sea is next seen in a rocky cave, Mr. Conquest again displaying singular skill in his appearance as the Rock Fiend, one of his most remarkable changes. He has been imprisoned for two hundred years, but is released by a fairy. Sindbad gives him some rum, and Mr. Conquest then performs a scene similar to that in the famous drama *Drink*. It is far more than a caricature, for the actor displays very remarkable powers in the grotesque scene of realism, in which he touches on topics of the day, political and social, in the most vigorous manner, and gains enthusiastic applause for the striking ability he displays. The ‘phantom fight’ for the possession of the magic diamond is another of the effects which would alone be

sufficient to attract crowds to see *Sindbad*. The leaps from the traps to the roof, and the daring and original conception of the whole scene, cannot be too highly commended. It is called the Reptiles' Haunt, and hosts of grim creatures are coiled about in all directions. Sometimes the performers leap into their gaping jaws, and the next moment are vomited forth in the most extraordinary fashion, being either tossed into the air or thrown into the depths of fissures in the rocks. . . .

"In the representation of Sindbad we have already shown what a tower of strength Mr. Conquest himself was. The very Emperor of Pantomime, he still retains his position by right of pre-eminent skill and originality. Not only in weird and fanciful ideas, but in striking ability as a pantomime actor, he stands in the front rank, and his Old Man of the Sea is worthy of the many fantastic figures he has already created. He received admirable support from the company, beginning with Mr. Dan Leno, who made a capital Tinker, full of drollery and grotesque business. Some of his scenes were particularly good, and he was most humorous throughout the pantomime."

It was after this that Augustus Harris engaged Leno for the next year's pantomime at Drury Lane, at a salary of £28 a week.

George Conquest's participation was cut short by an accident. His first appearance was in a huge jar which came up through a trap. At one morning performance in January the men on the ropes miscalculated, so that the jar overturned as it reached the stage. George broke his shoulder-blade, but pluckily finished out the scene, and even went on to play the Rock Fiend; but on doctor's advice he then gave in and let Cruikshanks take over the part. This accident no doubt confirmed George's suspicion that he was getting too old for such strenuous work as pantomime, and he never again attempted it.

By this time the new generation was growing up. Cissy Farrell, who joined the stock company in the autumn of 1886, played the tiny part of "Gnomite" in *Sindbad*, and next year appeared as Sesame in *The Forty Thieves*. She was soon followed by her sister Amy and her cousins Laura and Amy Dyson. *The Fair One with the Golden Locks* (1892) had five members of the family in its cast:

Cissy Farrell as King Crow,  
 Amy Farrell as Pastorelle,  
 Arthur Conquest as Mrs. Crow, and later as Owl,  
 Laura Dyson as Florinda,  
 Fred Conquest as Demonio.

## SURREY PANTOMIME

This pantomime boasted a wonderful "property" Giant. At first only his legs were seen, rising almost to the height of the proscenium; then the Prince climbed a tree to come level with his head:

"This gigantic construction is calculated to give juveniles food for Christmas dreams. The eyes open and shut, and the hideous mouth, full of irregular teeth, has a most bloodthirsty grin. Once seen, this Giant is not likely to be forgotten."

An inconspicuous figure in the cast-list was "Mr. Lester" (*sic*) who played Funnyface and later a Policeman in the Harlequinade. Here is the first mention of Frank Lister, who soon became an outstanding actor and an invaluable member of the company.

From 1890 onwards there were several revivals of subjects already used—*Puss in Boots* (1892), *Aladdin* (1895), *Sinbad* (1896), *Jack and Jill* (1898); but in every case some new twist gave them variety.

*Aladdin* was noted for a first-rate flying ballet and for the brilliant trap work of Fred and Arthur Conquest. The new *Sinbad*<sup>1</sup> had two such ballets, one representing the gambols of sea-creatures and the other fireflies in flight. Both were remarkable enough to warrant description:

"Scene five 'At the Bottom of the Sea' is one of the masterpieces of the Surrey management, the back and centre being composed of vessels, many mast-high, and bedecked with deep-sea greenery; and the stage is enlivened by the gruesome sport of oysters, lobsters, crabs, sharks and cuttlefish, and by the sinuous gliding and writhings of the Marine Monster (a sort of sea-lizard), acted with wonderful skill by Herr Klepper, the contortionist. . . . The victims of the storm lying on the ocean bed are found by Coraline who gives to the twins" (played by Fred and Arthur Conquest) "silver life-belts. Here ensues the submarine fight of the twins, aided mainly by their mother" (Cogia, the "Dame," otherwise George the younger), "against the Old Man of the Sea and the Merman. The struggle is for the belts, and the twins are for one moment warring with their foes upon the bottom, and at another springing down from the height of many fathoms (in the 'flies') by means of an ingenious flight-giving apparatus, and then rising up again above the sunken vessel. Great praise is due to Messrs. Fred and Arthur Conquest for their management of the flying machine's trips under the ocean bed and so forth, in this semi-aqueous, semi-aerial combat."

<sup>1</sup> Programmes and advertisements of the 1887 pantomime have the spelling "Sindbad"; those of the 1896 version omit the "d."

Later on Sinbad finds his way to the Valley of Diamonds, and this brings him to the Fireflies in the Glow-worm Glade, led by Amy Dyson as Coraline:

"A rare effect is produced by these mid-air dances, the diamonds in the valley gleaming the while, and finally each dancer is bedecked by an electrically lit garland. The impression is one of exceeding beauty."

The chief dramatic effects were rendered by Frank Lister, who in nine years had graduated from "Funnyface" to playing George Conquest's rôle, the Old Man of the Sea. Always a master of make-up, he caused many shudders as he emerged from his jar, with "a bent body covered with green scales, long grey hair and beard, and tapering, fin-like hands." Like Conquest before him, he gave a burlesque of the *delirium tremens* scene in *Drink*, which brought down the house and was reckoned Robsonian in its energy.

Interesting from the family point of view is the appearance of a new principal girl, Lottie Hallett—as agile and full of fun as a kitten, and not much larger. She was replacing Laura Dyson, who had recently married Herbert Leonard and was resting for family reasons. Lottie was a great success—her tiny, child-like figure gave piquancy to her song "Little Mascot" and the dance accompanying it—but she thought of the engagement as purely for the duration of the pantomime. George's youngest son thought otherwise, however—he engaged her for life as Mrs. Arthur Conquest.

Of the remaining pantomimes there is not much to be said. A revival of *Jack and Jill* in 1898 was mainly remarkable for the incarnation of a Pantomime Fairy by the colossal George *filis*. A line-sketch in *Entr'acte* shows him looking like a handsome dowager duchess, with his high aquiline features and multiple chins. With the drawing is the saucy commentary:

"I have been interrogated as to where the best-looking and most graceful of this season's pantomime fairies is to be found. This is a matter that is fraught with direst consequences, and it is of so personal a nature that one may easily give offence in offering an opinion. There are numbers of handsome fairies in evidence this year in pantomime, but I think that most of these dear creatures will agree with me that there is one at the Surrey to whom the cake is due. Don't trust to the little drawing which accompanies this piece, go and see for yourselves. Very tasty, indeed!"

In the following year, George the elder made a second visit to America, to produce the flying ballet for which by now he was famous. So superior were the Surrey ballets to anything else in London, that for some years past the West End managers had been calling him in as a consultant.

*Entr'acte's* cartoon of *Goody Two-Shoes* (1899) shows the two George Conquests together, giving an excellent picture of the father towards the end of his life. It is captioned "George Conquest pulls the strings at the Surrey," and portrays him looking up at a pantomime fairy whom he is dangling, fisher-wise, on the end of a rod and line. In forty years he has changed very little: his fair hair has greyed, and now, after remaining clean-shaven all through the hirsute Victorian era, he wears a moustache; but, under a long overcoat liberally trimmed with astrakhan, his figure is still slight and neat as a boy's.

Both this pantomime and George's last production, *Miss Muffit* (1900), were notable for the expert trap work of Fred and Arthur Conquest. The latter, somewhat to his father's anxiety, delighted in practising the dangerous triple pirouette which he was one of the few to achieve. He was also starting on a monkey impersonation which in later years became one of his most brilliant effects, just as his brother Fred specialised in the pantomime Goose.

*Miss Muffit* was a joyous climax to George's work, swift-moving and hilarious, blending topical patriotism with the old fairy and demon effects from the Grecian. Centred round the loss and recovery of a magic spoon, it ingeniously combines the rhymes of Little Miss Muffit and the Maid and the Magpie. Jack, the principal boy, returns from South Africa, hailed by Tommies in khaki; and the Boer War element is sustained by the presence in the Palace of Midas of many figures who would have been surprised to find themselves there—Kruger, Roberts, Baden-Powell, De Wet, French, Sir George White, Kitchener and Redvers Buller. Alongside these pillars of British Empire we find the Golden Goblin (a creature of Tarantula type) who comes down a chimney and tries to persuade Miss Muffit to sell him the magic spoon, but she tricks him by giving him a counterfeit. Miss Muffit is put on trial for stealing the spoon, but is of course acquitted. As logical concomitants of this action, we have the Bottomless Pool—a fanciful dream of fays and water-nymphs, floating gracefully above actual rushes and real water—and Arthur Conquest as Weary Waggles, Nix the demon head and a gigantic Parrot. This revival gave rise to the illustrated "interview" with Nix from which we

have already quoted. The Head itself survived among Arthur Conquest's effects, until destroyed in the bombing of his flat during the second World War.

In May 1901 George Conquest died, and with him something of the spirit of old-fashioned pantomime. George the younger kept on the theatre until 1904, producing workmanlike versions of *Cinderella* and *The Forty Thieves*, but his efforts were overshadowed by the memory of his father.

A spontaneous tribute is paid by the editor of *Entr'acte* at the beginning of 1903 :

"Never do I approach this season without thinking of the late George Conquest, who was the most practical producer of pantomime that I ever encountered. . . .

"When Conquest went to the Surrey he did not forget to display his good judgment, for such comedians as Dan Leno, Johnny Danvers and Tom Costello figured in the earliest of his pantomime productions . . . and I am inclined to surmise that he was responsible for much of Mr. Oscar Barrett's stage education.

"If I mistake not, those aerial flights were introduced by Mr. Conquest. . . . When I think of all these things, I should be ungrateful if I allowed Christmas to pass away without thinking of George Conquest."

## CHAPTER XVI

### *End of an Epoch*

ON December 8, 1890, dramatic history was altered . . . in a negative sense. Mrs. Conquest went out for a drive with her daughter Louisa. On the Thames Embankment the horses took fright and bolted. Louisa kept still in her seat until the coachman succeeded in guiding the horses behind a tramcar and bringing them to a stop; but her mother jumped out and fell on the back of her head. She was taken to Charing Cross Hospital with concussion and a nasty scalp wound, but she would not stay there—it was close on Christmas, with all the extra work of a pantomime at the theatre and a houseful of young people at home. Somehow she took a chill, erysipelas developed in her wound, and within ten days she was dead.

This was a blow from which George Conquest never recovered. For thirty-three years his wife had been his inseparable companion and helpmate; together they had brought up eleven children, of whom they had lost only two—Lizzie, and Daisy, who had died the previous year at sixteen, from the effects of a chill caught while sea-bathing. George continued to work, but the springs of ambition were dead in him. He had been on the point of buying the Adelphi and entering on West End management: now he had no heart to carry out the scheme and he stayed on at the Surrey.

The horses that had killed his wife were never driven again. For a while they stayed idle in the stable, then he sold them and bought one of the new "horseless carriages"—a cumbrous, noisy and draughty Daimler, where he sat perched in state and discomfort until he decided that this novel mode of transport was not for him and bought a fresh team of horses.

It has been stated that after his wife's death George never acted again, but this is not strictly accurate. He did in fact retire about this time, letting his dramatic mantle fall on the broad shoulders of Frank Lister, and his comedy rôles pass to Charles Cruikshanks; but he made isolated appearances in one or two of his favourite parts. In March 1891 he played the Greek, Ciro Panitza, in *My*

*Jack*, and in 1893 the Miser in *Mankind*—receiving an ovation from the packed audience which showed that he still held his place in their hearts. His last recorded appearance was at a benefit for Cruikshanks in 1898.

During his first year or two at the Surrey George was living at Tufnell Park, which, though conveniently situated for the Grecian, was a long way from Blackfriars. He then moved to a beautiful house near Dulwich, still remembered with pleasure by those who knew it. The handsome and dashing young Fred used to collect the girls from the theatre after rehearsals and drive them over there for tea-parties in the garden before the evening show.

After Mrs. Conquest's death this place was given up, and George moved first to Tulse Hill and then to Brixton Hill, where he remained till he died. He did not let sorrow make him misanthropic: each house in turn absorbed the warm and welcoming atmosphere which the Conquests create around themselves.

A reporter visiting George at Tulse Hill in 1893 found him at work in his study, with a model of the Surrey stage on his desk and a portrait of his father hanging above it. The windows opened on a large garden, gay with flower-beds, where dogs lay sleeping in the sun and children played on the lawns. George kept open house for all the family—children and grandchildren, nephews and nieces. In the tall old house at Brixton Hill the same custom prevailed: on Sundays they all gathered up for midday dinner, a special table in the window being kept for the children. Once his daughter-in-law suggested to her husband that they might spend a Sunday by themselves—among so many they would never be missed. But next time George Conquest saw her he asked, with a quizzical affection that held just a shade of reproach: "Where were you on Sunday, Lottie? I didn't see you at dinner."

In April 1883 George had changed the family name by deed-poll, adding "Conquest" to their original surname. He thus became in fact what he had been called all his life: George Augustus Oliver Conquest. Very typical of him is the fact that the solicitor drawing up the document was Thomas Beard—little Lizzie's husband, who by then had married again. The average father would have cherished a grudge against the man whom he might well have held responsible for his daughter's untimely death: George, in his warm-hearted generosity, kept him as his family solicitor and friend.

## END OF AN EPOCH

In the late 1890's, when a council of London theatrical managers was formed under the presidency of Sir Henry Irving, George Conquest was his right-hand man; whenever Irving wanted advice on some technical point it was to George and not to the West End managers that he applied. For George knew his business from the ground up. He once told an interviewer that in the course of his career he had been a money-taker, check-taker, acting manager, stage manager, musician, property-master, costumier, scene-painter, actor, author and prompter.

George's memory was phenomenal. He had a vast library of French plays and could remember what he had once read. If any critic suspected that a "new" melodrama was an unacknowledged adaptation from the French, he would go straight to George Conquest to have it identified. H. G. Hibbert relates how, when an English author read him the first half of a play founded on *Léonard* (*The Ticket-of-Leave Man*), "Conquest blandly took up the recital and summarised the second half for his discomfited visitor."

George himself borrowed and adapted largely from the French, but he was always honest about it. After one of his plays at the Grecian Johnny Gideon congratulated him, saying: "George, that was a splendid speech of Miss Mandlebert's in the second act. How well it went!" He replied: "Not a word of it was mine. It was Balzac's. And if ever I am hard up for a good exit line or a strong bit of 'clap-trap' to finish an act, I fly to my shelves, get down a volume of Balzac, and never miss finding the thing I require." On another occasion Gideon suggested to him that he had borrowed a good idea from D'Ennery's *Don César de Bazan*. "The situation was not the invention of D'Ennery," replied George, "the author of it is Paul de Koch, and D'Ennery stole it from his drama of *Pascal Bruno*."

Of his own plays he used to say frankly that in each succeeding drama he used as much as possible of the wood and canvas from the last one, and often the same motive with a slight new twist: "All my plays might be called by the same title—*Falsely Accused*!"

In 1892 George Conquest was one of the witnesses before a Select Committee of the House of Commons upon the relations between the London County Council and the Theatres and Music Halls. The committee in its findings distinguished three classes of licence:

- (1) Theatres proper, in which no smoking or drinking should be allowed in the auditorium.

- (2) Music-Halls, or Theatres of Varieties, which might present ballet, ballet-divertissement, and ballet d'action, and also sketches, under the following conditions: no such sketch should last more than 30 minutes or have more than six principal performers; at least 30 minutes must elapse between sketches, and no two sketches in one evening should have a connected plot.
- (3) Concert and Dancing Rooms.

The Committee further ruled that all licences should expire on an annual licensing day; that the licensing authorities might grant permits for occasional performances, having due regard to the safety of the building and the character of the proposed entertainment; and that provisional or occasional licences could be granted at any time of year. They did not recommend the abolition of censorship: on the contrary, they thought it might with advantage be extended to music-halls and other places of public entertainment.

The new century soon brought with it a nation-wide sorrow. On the evening of Tuesday, January 22, 1901, when a packed house was preparing to enjoy the pantomime, George Conquest came before the curtain with a telegram in his hand, and, his voice faltering with emotion, told his audience that Queen Victoria was dead. He asked them to disperse quietly, assuring them that their money would be refunded. All theatres closed for four days, and again on the day of the Queen's funeral.

Before the year was out, a more personal sorrow had descended upon the Surrey: the loss of their beloved "Guv'nor."

George Conquest had always enjoyed excellent health. Although he was no Puritan in his attitude towards the good things of life, his passion for athletics had kept him frugal and sober; hard work and a philosophic temperament, and the society of all the young people around him, had prevented him from ageing mentally. Early in 1901, *Entr'acte* was able to answer a correspondent who wanted to know whether Fred and Arthur Conquest were the sons of "Old George": "Of course they are—but steady on the 'Old George,' or Conquest, Sen., may want to show you there is a lot of 'go' in him yet."

But the years of strenuous work had taken toll of his heart. He suffered occasional agonising attacks of angina, and in May 1901 these grew worse. No one outside his family realised that he was

seriously ill, but he himself felt that the end was near and looked forward to death with that cool courage which was one of his outstanding qualities.

On the evening of May 13 he was up and dressed as usual. He wrote a letter, took it to the post, and returned to have supper with his family. Later that night another heart-attack developed, and at two o'clock in the morning he died—as he would have wished, in harness, with none of the helplessness and frustration of a long illness.

Hundreds of people came to his funeral, and blinds were drawn all along the route from his home on Brixton Hill to the cemetery at West Norwood. So many wreaths had been sent that the hearse could not hold them all, and a special carriage took the rest. Conspicuous among them were a cross of orchids on the coffin, sent by his family, and a huge harp with lily-of-the-valley strings, from the staff at the Surrey theatre. Among those who sent messages and flowers were Sir Henry Irving, J. L. Toole, Harry Nichols, Herbert Campbell and Dan Leno, and the Asaph Masonic Lodge.

When George Conquest's will was proved, it was found that he had left the good solid fortune of £64,000—all of it earned by his own efforts, in a profession which so often leads to bankruptcy. It must be remembered that George did not inherit his father's money—only the theatre and its equipment. Benjamin's equitable will, after making provision for his second wife, divided his fortune among his three daughters, who, with young families to bring up, would have good use for it; while George, with his energy and enterprise, could fend for himself. (The apparent neglect of Clara Dillon is explained by the fact that she had been left the whole of her mother's estate.)

As in so many other things, George Conquest was fortunate in the moment of his death. With Queen Victoria there had passed the solid stability and prosperity of the later nineteenth century. For many years the Surrey theatre had been almost the only attraction on the south side of the river; but now a number of music-halls were springing up to challenge its supremacy, and in another decade the cinema was launched, to tap the audiences from both. With George at the helm the adverse winds had not been noticed, but once his expert guidance was removed the fortunes of the Surrey began to decline, just as the Grecian had foundered when he left it to its fate.

One by one, too, his old friends were going their way : Blanchard had died in 1889, Pettitt in 1893 and Meritt in 1895, Holland in 1896, and "Jingo" Macdermott only a few days before Conquest himself. It was left to the oldest friend of all, Henry Spry, to speak his epitaph :

"I have known George Conquest over forty-six years, and never knew him to be guilty of a mean or ungenerous action. He was one of the best and truest of friends a man ever could have. He was a thorough business man, conducting all his affairs himself in a most methodical manner, so that he has left everything perfectly straight and clear. A most faithful and loving husband, and ask his nine children what sort of a father he was."



Laura Dyson  
as Principal Girl

## CHAPTER XVII

### *Farewell to the Surrey*

FROM that time onwards the history of the Surrey can be resumed in one sad word—*Ichabod* . . . the glory has departed.

There seemed no reason why this should be so. With Conquest commonsense the theatre had been left, not to George who was already middle-aged, had been comfortably installed, at his father's expense, as landlord of the Crown public house in Tabard Street and was much in request as a producer at outside theatres, but to the two younger sons. They were still under thirty, but they were theatre born and bred and knew all the ropes. Fred was a fine comedian with a touch of Dan Leno about him, while Arthur was as good an acrobat as his father and had a genius for animal impersonations.

In the year or two that preceded George Conquest's death, however, considerable changes had taken place. A critic writing in 1898 had commented:

"They are quite a little family party at the Surrey—they get on very happily together . . . The *bonne entente* existing in the company is very evident throughout. . . . It is all very pleasant and entertaining."

The company at that time had been largely composed of Conquest girls and men, with their respective husbands and wives: Fred Conquest and Kate Olga Vernon; Arthur Conquest and Lottie Hallett; Laura Dyson and Herbert Leonard; Cissy Farrell and Frank Lister; with the two unmarried girls, Amy Farrell and Amy Dyson. Others who stayed for many years were Ernest Leicester, the hero; Charles Cruikshanks, the comedy man; John Webb, the first villain; Annie Conway, who shared the heroine's parts with Laura Dyson and Cissy Farrell; Mrs. Bennett, who alternated the parts of *femme fatale* and heroine's faithful friend; and Maud Nelson—principal boy in six pantomimes.

But by 1900 the coterie had broken up: Lister had gone to the Pavilion and his wife, though she stayed on at the Surrey for a while, had followed him; Laura Dyson was absorbed by her young

family; Amy Farrell had gone to the West End in pantomime, and then struck out independently in a music-hall act ("and a very nice one too," comments *Entr'acte*). The young Conquests found themselves in a new century, unable to recreate the atmosphere which had been so long sustained by their father's magic touch; and so, with the confidence of their youth, they launched out into an entirely different line.

From September 1901, with George Belmont, they worked on the twice-nightly system, with prices ranging from 2d. to 1s. A typical programme from this period includes a one-act dramatic sketch, *Nancy* (Bill Sykes), and several turns: Little Zola, Marguerite and May (Duettists), Edie Rivers (serio and coon dancer), etc. The pantomime, *Aladdin*, for the first time since 1881, had not a single Conquest, or any member of the old stock company, in the cast.

When it ended in February 1902, George Conquest took over from his brothers, and the house reverted to melodrama. A play by C. B. Nichols, produced in May, was greeted with the old enthusiastic applause, calling manager and author to the footlights. Up to the end of 1903 the theatre struggled on gamely with luridly-titled dramas in which the old themes of *London*, *Crime* and *Sin* predominated. (*The London Fireman*, *Tempted to Sin*, *A City of Sin*, *The Hidden Crime*, *Fiends of London*, *Her Partner in Sin*, *Vultures of London* or *In Toils of Terror*.)

The 1902 pantomime, *Cinderella*, again had the names of George Conquest and Maud Nelson in the cast. George as a "little" girl in sash and pinafore, complete with a sunbonnet and skipping-rope, was particularly fetching. Both of them played the following year in the last pantomime staged at the Surrey, *The Forty Thieves*. George had realised that he could not carry on, and since this was his farewell, he gave of his best: trap-jumping, aerial ballet, and a wonderful display of fairy fountains.

Two sad pieces of news appeared simultaneously in the theatre papers at the end of February 1904—the death of Henry Spry, who had written a pantomime every year since 1858, and the fact that the Surrey was up for auction. It was rumoured that the Salvation Army had their eye upon it, but in this case it was spared from the fate of the Grecian.

The Conquests' farewell benefit took place in July 1904 and lasted for a full week. The old stock company rallied round, so that the programme is a roll-call of nearly every performer connected with the Surrey, including about seventy variety artistes.

## FAREWELL TO THE SURREY

It was an unusually sad and subdued audience that assembled on the Monday evening to hear their old favourite, Ernest Leicester, deliver a farewell ode written by Malcolm Watson. Although hardly an inspired flight of poetry, this deserves to be quoted as a sincere expression of feeling which drew cheers and tears from listeners already wrought to an emotional pitch:

*... To us remains, at least, this splendid thought—  
 The Surrey's fame can never be forgot;  
 For if, indeed, its glories must depart,  
 Its name lies close enshrined within each heart,  
 Nor lies alone, for, side by side with it,  
 Behold the name of "Conquest" largely writ.  
 Just for an instant, through the long years run,  
 Back to that famous time in 'eighty-one,  
 When, with the dear old "Guv'nor" in command,  
 His crew a merry and devoted band,  
 The good ship Surrey ventured on the seas,  
 Spreading its sails to catch each fav'ring breeze.  
 For twenty years his bulldog British pluck  
 Brought him the best of fortune and good luck,  
 And what to life a sweeter flavour lends—  
 His kindly nature made him hosts of friends.  
 Alas! he's gone, yet sure the earth lies light  
 On one who fought so good and brave a fight.  
 Then to the vacant throne was fitly beckoned  
 Our friend and loyal comrade "George the Second."  
 How he upheld the Surrey's ancient glory  
 Is for you all an old, familiar story.  
 Though that Fate decrees, with hostile frown,  
 The curtain on him, too, must be rung down.  
 The end is near, no longer shall the sound  
 Of happy laughter and of mirth abound;  
 No more the villain ply his horrid art,  
 Nor dashing hero share sweet maiden's heart.  
 To one and all, with many a long-drawn sigh,  
 We soon must bid a sorrowful good-bye.  
 Yet grateful that, while mem'ry shall last,  
 We hold a priceless treasure in the past.  
 What if the good old Surrey disappear,  
 Its place is now, and ever shall be—here.  
 (Hand on heart.)*

The Conquest brothers all appeared in various favourite rôles during the week: George as the rotund and bibulous tailor Goosey in the farce *We all have our little Faults*; as Jacques Strop in *Robert*

*Macaire*; and in his father's star part of Daniel Groodge in *Mankind*. Fred and his wife with Frank Lister supported George in the first-named farce; while Arthur played the man-monkey in a sketch, *Zacky*, drawn from *For Ever*.

In his farewell speech George Conquest did not mince words. He said frankly that the L.C.C. had been the cause of his departure:

"I have found it impossible to stand it any longer. They will not allow standing room; they want gangways all over the theatre, which would take the best part of half the seating capacity, and it would be impossible to make the place pay under such circumstances. That is the sole reason why I am going from this theatre."

George then formally thanked his staff and orchestra, the variety artists and members of the old stock company who had come back for his benefit:

"But my thanks are due principally to the great British public who have patronised us so well and put the Conquest family in the proud position they hold today."

As some consolation to his audience, George added that, although he was leaving the Surrey, he would stay on in South London, and that soon he would be appearing at the Elephant and Castle. The Surrey would return to the two-shows-a-night formula under the direction of Mr. Walter Stephens.

With a dramatic sweep the curtain fell, but George Conquest appeared in front of it and cheering was renewed. He retired, bowing his acknowledgments; then the band played the National Anthem, in which the whole audience joined.

\*

The rest, if not silence, is a semi-eclipse, shot through with an occasional gleam of light.

By the end of 1904 the Surrey had passed to Frank Macnaghten, who ran it as a music-hall for several years. In 1911 it was described as "the Coliseum of South London," with 1,000 pit seats at 6*d.*, 350 circle seats at 1*s.*, 900 upper circle seats at 3*d.*, and several rows of orchestra stalls.

In 1912 it was under the direction of Charles T. Aldrich. Three years later the name of Conquest again appears in the bills, when Fred and his wife played in a farce *What a Dog!*—Fred as "Dick Twister, alias Fido the Dog," and Olga Vernon as "Mrs. Easy, a Lover of Dogs."

During the first World War several noted performers sang at the Surrey, including Marie Lloyd, George Formby and Charles

Austin—often, alas! to empty houses, for the air-raids gave the theatre a set-back from which it never really recovered.

A brief revival of dignity came in 1920, when Ben Greet's company presented *The Taming of the Shrew*; and later Mrs. Hamilton-Miln inaugurated an ambitious Opera season with a repertory including *Faust*, *Rigoletto*, *The Flying Dutchman*, and lesser-known works by English composers. This season ended, in tragi-comic fashion, with the orchestra going on strike after the first act of *Maritana*, because there was no money at the end of the week for their salaries. After much argument and a speech from the stage by Mrs. Miln herself, they resumed at 10.45 p.m., and the opera—with many cuts—finished after midnight.

In the 1921 pantomime a younger Fred, son of the second George Conquest, played the Goose—a character which his Uncle had already developed as his own speciality.

"You must study geese properly if you want to imitate them on the stage," Fred the elder once confided to A. E. Wilson. "At my old home I used to study them for hours and make sketches of their funny little ways. If the audience could see my face they would see that I was expressing the Goose's moods and emotions, and this in my opinion is the intelligent way of doing the Goose business. Every gesture of the wings, every step of the webbed feet, every movement of the body is studied. I have practised for hours in front of a looking-glass."

On Whit Monday, 1921, George Conquest came back as the She-Ape Kala, in a production of *Tarzan of the Apes* which recalled the palmy days of the Surrey, with its luscious jungle background, a lion growling behind bars, and an elephant coming on free.

For a brief while the Surrey became a cinema, attracting crowded houses in 1923 with a film *The Man they could not Hang*. But in the following year it closed down and remained shut for good. By 1932 it had the wretched look of an abandoned building in a poor neighbourhood: "A leprous Ionic façade with boarded-up entrance, sleeping tramps in the newspaper-strewn loggia, peeling plaster columns, and a general air of desolation."

In the September of that year an application was made on behalf of an unnamed syndicate to reopen the theatre, after restorations calculated to cost £30,000, with melodrama, Shakespeare and classical plays at popular prices. But the suggestion never materialised, and the Surrey was still closed on its 150th birthday, November 7, 1932.

An auction was proposed in 1934, but on September 20 of that year the site was bought by the adjoining Royal Eye Hospital with a view to building an annexe. Over a year later, on November 18, 1935, the long-disused curtain was raised again for a poignant little ceremony. Jack Hobbs and P. J. Hannon, Chairman of the Appeal Committee for the new hospital, with nurses of the Royal Eye Hospital for chorus and a crowd of workmen for audience, took oxy-acetylene burners and cut through the first girder. As it came crashing down on the stage, the spectators cheered; then the curtain was dropped for the last time and the building was left to the demolition workers.

Soon after this A. E. Wilson visited it: he gives us a sad little cameo to set beside Warwick Wroth's last impression of the Grecian:

"One melancholy autumn day just before it was demolished after long closure, to make way for an extension to the hospital, I explored it from gallery to those dank, dark depths beneath the stage which still contained the ancient wooden machinery, the pulleys, lifts and windlasses that were used in the transformation scenes. From this abyss would ascend the demons and sprites that always haunted the Pantomimes during the ~~regime~~ régime of George Conquest. The stage was vast and was seamed with the star traps and such devices from which daring acrobats would make their surprising appearance. Never shall we see their like again."

When the second World War broke out, the theatre had been razed, but the projected hospital building had not yet been started, and to the present day it remains unbuilt. At the time of writing, a jagged expanse of cellarage, like a decayed tooth, stretches between the Eye Hospital and a nearby Salvation Army Hostel. Across it stands a hoarding on which a soap-powder advertisement, with unconscious irony, displays a surging, white-crested wave, poised as if to obliterate the last trace of those walls which for a century and a half had been aglow with light and colour, vibrant with laughter and tremulous with suspense.

PART IV

BRANCHES OF THE TREE



## CHAPTER XVIII

### *The Third Generation*

OF all George Conquest's sons Arthur was the one who had inherited the fullest measure of his father's talent, with a *joie de vivre* and a capacity for making friends that never forsook him. His success in later life as an animal impersonator has made people inclined to overlook his general ability as an athlete and a straight actor.

All his school holidays were spent in the theatre, where his great joy was to try out the gymnastic apparatus, and many of the early Surrey programmes bear his name as "Master Arthur." He used often to tell anecdotes of his apprenticeship as an actor. Once when he was about sixteen and looked still younger, he was playing a French waiter in a melodrama in which his brother Fred, as a shady aristocrat, had just informed his partner in crime that it was quite safe to discuss their schemes in front of the waiter as he understood no English. At that moment there was a resounding crash in the wings, and a small, slight figure came on stage and blurted out, in cultured schoolboy accents: "Oh, Fred—I've dropped the blasted tray!"

On another occasion, made up as a pompous middle-aged man, he beckoned a footman to him, pressed a tip into his hand, and said with the greatest *aplomb*: "My man, here's a hansom—go and fetch a sovereign!" Quite unconscious of having slipped up, he could not make out why everyone was laughing.

But these teething-troubles were soon over, and by the time he was nineteen he was already a sufficiently good character actor to give a lifelike representation of a village greybeard. Four years later, in the curtain-raiser to *The Motto on the Duke's Crest*, he showed his powers as a comedian by "keeping the house in a roar from start to finish."

During the first three years of the twentieth century he played in pantomime at Drury Lane, and in 1904 he went over to New York as the Lord of Misrule in *Humpty Dumpty*. An article published in the "Home Magazine" of the New York *Evening World* at this

time is worth quoting for its excellent "worm's eye view" of the trap mechanism.

"If Humpty Dumpty should have a great fall at the New Amsterdam Theatre it's fairies to farthings that he'd fall down a trap. There are 'star traps' that open up like French artichokes, 'vampire traps' with folding wings, 'funny posts' which strike one as anything but funny, 'dives' which lead to subterranean surprises, and 'slides' which would try the nerve of the immortal Kelly.

"Come and see Mr. Conquest go through the traps,' was an invitation from stage director Ned Weyburn which I was more than willing to accept. The region under the stage was a wilderness of traps. 'Conquest will come through that dive,' said Weyburn, 'and then he'll be shot up through the star trap. . . Here he comes!' S-s-swish! came something through a rubber-masked hole above our heads, and a red object flopped into a hammock-like contrivance, then swung itself over the side and streaked for the nearest trap.

"It was the Demon Lord of Misrule. He sprang panting into the trap, steadied himself a second, cried 'Go!' and four men, yanking at many heavily weighted ropes, shot him upwards. The small platform on which the Demon stood struck the stage with a terrible thud, and almost as soon as one could turn, the Demon was in the hammock again, out of it, in the trap, and gone! He did not utter a word until he was ready for the third ascent, when he found breath enough to gasp: 'Give her hell this time, boys!' which, after all, may be perfectly proper language for a Demon to use.

"That last one was bully!' exclaimed the delighted Demon, as he tumbled out of the 'dive' and indulged in the luxury of a breathing-spell. 'Hard work?' he repeated, scrambling into an English ulster which transformed the Demon into Arthur Conquest. 'Well, it isn't as easy as falling off a log, but it's a lot better sport. Dangerous? Yes, I suppose it is when you stop to think of it. But I don't stop to think. You can't afford to in this kind of work—the minute you do you lose your nerve and are sure to get hurt. Have I ever been hurt? Yes, I've had both my ankles and collar-bone broken, but I let bygones be bygones!' Conquest pointed to a blue line on the platform of the trap: 'See this line? That's the toe mark. Get your toes over that mark and you're shot off at an angle, and there is no telling where or how you will land. You can't be too careful when going through a twenty-one inch hole. That is five inches smaller than the traps I have been used to in England, but the effect of a smaller trap is more startling to the audience. I want to do even higher springs when I return to

London. I have done an eighteen-foot spring there, turning three pirouettes as well, but I intend to break that record, or my neck, when I get back. I mean to do the eighteen-foot spring and the three pirouettes here at least once, though it is rather risky with only a twenty-one inch hole to go through.'"

Back in England next year, Arthur Conquest played the Cat in *Cinderella*, and instituted a daring stunt which enraptured the children in the house. Twice a day he would leap from the stage to one of the private boxes, and then run round the semi-circle of the auditorium on the ledge of the grand circle. The journey was not without its risks, as little hands clutched excitedly at his ears and tail, stroked his head and pushed sweets and coins into his mouth. He would come back on stage with his mask rattling like a money-box, considerably embarrassed by these unsolicited tokens of affection. One memento, however, he treasured to the end of his life—a toy soldier shyly pushed at him by King Edward's little grandson, afterwards our beloved Prince of Wales.

In the Drury Lane pantomime of 1906, *Sindbad*, Arthur Conquest was scheduled to play the Old Man of the Sea, but two days before the opening night Harry Randall, playing the "Dame," Mrs. Sindbad, fell ill. Conquest abandoned his own part to his understudy (who, incidentally, had to read it) and stepped into the breach. In such circumstances it is customary to ask the audience's indulgence for the unrehearsed deputy, but on this occasion no apologies were needed: his improvisation was a performance. As the *Observer* said: "he not only got through but got there, with more than a touch of the quaint femininity of Dan Leno." Other papers agreed that it would have been difficult to tell that he had not been originally cast for the part, and that his performance was one "which Mr. Randall has yet to show that he can improve upon."

So delighted were the Directors that they presented him with a special cheque, accompanied by a solid-gold cigarette case engraved "He came, he saw, he made a Conquest" and a tiny circular matchbox with the simple message: "A.C. from A.C." (Arthur Collins). "Mr. Conquest certainly did wonders," comments the *Daily Mail*, reporting on the ceremony, "and one will be surprised if he is ever allowed to leave the Lane."

He did, in fact, remain there for the next twenty-one years, the sequence being only broken by an absence of three years in France and Flanders during the first World War, for which he had volunteered although he was well over age. In the course of his service

he was slightly gassed. Demobilised in December 1919 he went round to Drury Lane, where Arthur Collins was so glad to see him that, though it was too late to use his services in the pantomime then in preparation, he put him straight back on the pay-roll at his former salary.

In one of these pantomimes his daughter Betty made her first appearance, at the ripe age of two. She was carried on stage by Whimsical Walker, who set her down in the centre and then affronted her infant dignity by hanging a string of sausages round her neck. Betty got a laugh that many an experienced actress might have envied, as she gave the Clown a look of withering scorn, turned her back on him, and toddled determinedly off stage.

When her father was acting, Betty had the privilege of watching from the wings, in a little niche between the act-drop and the groove of the iron safety-curtain. She was put in charge of one of the scarlet-clad "Greencoats" (flunkeys) who are such a unique feature of Drury Lane, whose duty it was to retrieve her before the curtain was dropped, midway in the performance. Once her guardian was detained, and the child—about six years old at the time—stayed flattened in her niche, watching the curtain creep down towards her. It was not more than a foot or two above her head when the man bursting frantically through a crowd of scene-shifters, snatched her away. She would not, of course, have been crushed, but it would have been a terrifying experience for a tiny child to stay trapped in blank darkness behind the iron wall to the end of the interval, or until someone, realising her plight, had raised the curtain specially to free her.

Arthur Conquest stayed at Drury Lane and Covent Garden until 1922, when he was engaged by the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, to play the title rôle in *Mother Goose*. During the rest of 1922 and 1923 he toured with Will Evans in *The Lost Umbrella* and other sketches. He played two more pantomimes in the North of England, and then toured again as the Mayor of Heybridge in the farce *Biffy*. In this he was qualified as "one of the most brilliant actors that British comedy possesses." So good a mimic was he, incidentally, that once when he "went on" unannounced for George Graves, the latter's brother, who happened to be in the house, came round at the end, fully under the impression that he had been watching George.

It may be asked why, with his versatile talents, Arthur Conquest never became a top-ranking star such as Dan Leno—with whom both he and his brother were frequently compared. The answer

probably is that he had not the one-track mind that concentrates everything upon a single aim. There was something dilettante in his attitude—not towards his work, for that was always of the best, but towards his career as a whole. Like his father he worked incredibly hard while he was at it, but unlike George Conquest, whose whole life was centred in the theatre, once an engagement was finished he would go off and play with equal vigour. A fine all-round athlete, he excelled in cycle-racing and pole-vaulting. It was a great satisfaction to him when he was chosen to represent England in the latter event for the Olympic Games of 1908. In 1912 at Stamford Bridge, he won the Amateur Athletic Association's championship for pole-vaulting, when he was already in his late thirties. His widow has many cycle trophies won by him, including prizes presented by Sir Henry Irving, A. de Rothschild and George Edwardes.

Another interest of the Conquests was yacht-racing. Fred, who had a cottage in the Isle of Wight, kept a boat in the Solent which he and Arthur used to sail together.

Among the treasures of the Conquest family is a letter from Buckingham Palace written after a performance given in March 1916 for wounded soldiers, under the patronage and in the presence of King George V and Queen Mary. In it the King's secretary conveys His Majesty's thanks to the artistes who took part, "his appreciation of their kindness in so doing, and the excellence of every number presented." He adds a personal message of thanks to Arthur Conquest for his co-operation.

Like all the members of his family, Arthur Conquest had always enjoyed animal impersonations. His Squeak the Penguin in the Birmingham pantomime of 1925 produced spontaneous outbursts of clapping and was hailed by the *Birmingham Mail* as "An Immediate Conquest."

During his war service he had been impressed by the simian aspect of the Indian troops as they squatted on their haunches, wrapped in their dark cloaks. It was this that first gave him the idea of "Daphne, the Chimpanzee," which became his greatest and longest-lasting impersonation.

The act started at the Empire, Leeds, in 1927, when Conquest was on tour with Wee Georgie Wood in Maurice Cowan's production of *King Rags*, playing General Blah. It was originally a five-minute "turn," introduced by Georgie Wood with a little

speech saying that he felt sure the public, seeing the name of Conquest on the programme, would expect an animal turn from a member of the family so famous for them for generations.

During 1928 "Daphne" was first presented as a vaudeville act and toured the principal British Halls, also the first-class "dates" in the main cities of Europe. The audience's reaction when the actor pulled off his mask to take a call was always one of blank amazement, and it was this that prompted Sir Oswald Stoll to suggest that the act would be a still bigger draw if spectators were left in doubt as to whether they had been watching a monkey or a man. From that time onwards Arthur Conquest remained anonymous.

At first the act was presented by a male compère, Ferguson Bundy, but in 1929 he was replaced by Betty Conquest. The girl, very young and nervous, had wanted to gain confidence by playing first in a small town, but this could not be arranged, and she opened "cold" at the London Palladium. The turn was a tremendous success—everyone agreed that it was far better presented by a girl, for the kindhearted old ladies in the house were reassured that such a slim, gentle little person could not possibly ill-treat her "pet."

Everything was done to keep the secret, and the critics sportingly co-operated by the ambiguity of their notices, of which that in the *Nottingham Evening Post* describing Tom Arnold's pantomime *Sleeping Beauty* at Christmas, 1936, is a fair sample:

"Not since the far-off days when Phineas T. Barnum, most famous of showmen, set two Continents talking with a creature called the 'Great What Is It,' has anything of the kind occasioned more discussion and diversity of opinion than the performance given by Betty Conquest with Daphne in the *Sleeping Beauty* at the Theatre Royal this season. Is Daphne human or simian? that is the question, so hotly debated. Even now they are not sure. There is, however, general agreement that the turn is one of the best novelties seen in a Nottingham pantomime. It interests grown-ups and children alike.

"Youthful Betty Conquest, who presents Daphne, smiled charmingly but enigmatically when I asked her to read the riddle; Daphne herself was also reticent, being busy eating a succulent banana at the time. . . ."

The banana was no doubt one of the presents of fruit which animal-lovers in every town showered upon the popular "ape." Another recurrent episode was a visit from the R.S.P.C.A., who never failed to be attracted by one of Betty's gags. Pointing to a

### THE THIRD GENERATION

skip she would say: "That's what I keep her in when we're travelling round." Punctually an Inspector would appear to inquire into the matter, and would only withdraw when a sight of the chimpanzee's skin and mask had satisfied him that it was a mere human and not a precious animal that was undergoing the strain of twelve minutes' hard work in a cramped position with the sweltering heat of his cumbrous make-up.

"It was a nice act," says Betty reflectively, "because it needed very careful timing. Of course the monkey couldn't talk back, so I had to be on the *qui vive* all the time to wait until she had got her laugh, and 'feed' her a fresh gag before the scene dropped."

Betty always talks of Daphne as a character in her own right. So perfect was the illusion that she herself, during the act, almost shared the audience's belief that the monkey was real.

The act never palled. Father and daughter toured together for ten years, visiting Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Zurich, Basle. They were booked for Milan in 1933 when Arthur Conquest had a minor stroke and was obliged to cancel his bookings for some months; but he recovered well enough to go on playing up to the outbreak of war. From that time he lived quietly in London until he was bombed out, then at Kingswood, moving back to London in 1943, for the last two years of his life.

A tribute to his memory was paid by Wee Georgie Wood in *The Performer* of December 13, 1945:

"He had been in hospital for the past five months and had been so patient and uncomplaining, and although he had not been at home since the summer I can't tell you how much we miss him; there is an awful feeling of loss. I am only glad to say his end was very peaceful.' That came from his daughter Betty, who will be remembered in her father's brilliant act where he impersonated 'Daphne' the chimpanzee. It's nineteen years since Arthur and I toured in *King Rags*. I've never been associated with a more helpful or unselfish actor than dear Arthur Conquest."

It is strange that among the large family of George Conquest so few should have remained actively connected with the stage. George the younger—who retired to Romford in Essex and died there in 1926 quite suddenly, while strolling in his garden—left a son, Fred, and a daughter Cissie. She married an actor called Ernest Giles, who played as Selig—the reverse of his name. Her brother, after some success in pantomime, went to Southend

where he owned a pleasure-boat. Eventually, when his daughter married a South African and went to live in her husband's country, he left England to join them.

His uncle, the elder Fred, lived in the Isle of Wight until his death in 1940, at the age of seventy. He was very fond of children and it was a great disappointment to him that he had none; but his nephews and nieces were always made welcome and were devoted to him.

George's six surviving daughters all made good marriages and settled down happily to domestic life. They were charming and talented girls—Amy, in particular, having inherited her father's gift for painting—but none of them kept up her connection with the stage, and only one, Lydia, married an actor (Charles Martell, of the "Bennett and Martell" act).

"Ada—the 'flying fairy' of George's ill-fated American trip—by her marriage to a Frenchman became Madame Jouanno. One of her daughters, Adèle, is a musician, who for some time had her own band. Ada herself remained until recently in good health—a tiny, energetic figure, flitting about with robust independence; then, in the autumn of 1952, she had a stroke and died after a short illness."

Like all the Conquest girls, Arthur's daughter Betty gave up her career on marriage, but she has remained keenly interested in the theatre, and she has produced a daughter, Susan, to carry on the line. Though at the time of writing Susan is only eight years old, it is already six years since she made her stage début—carried on in a pantomime like her mother before her. The principal comedian on that occasion was Wee Georgie Wood, Arthur Conquest's old and valued friend, and it was at Croydon that he formally introduced Susan to the British public as a Conquest of the fifth generation. Let us hope that it may be an augury for her future career.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *The Dillons*

AMONG the portraits in our gallery, none stands out in such bold relief as Charles Dillon. This is partly due to the Pepysian candour of John Coleman, who liked him, quarrelled with him and helped him over a period of nearly forty years; but in general Dillon attracted anecdotes as a magnet does filings.

Dillon was born at Diss in Norfolk in 1819. (Hence his pseudonym "Cyrus Dissborn" in various stories by W. C. Day.) His mother is said to have played with Edmund Kean at Exeter and Guernsey, and later with Macready. She was married to Arthur Dillon, who brought up Charles as his son, imparting to him his own Irish brogue; but Coleman assures us that the boy's real father was her first husband, a certain Charles James Church. He describes how this shabby-genteel old man—who claimed to be a graduate of Balliol and was in fact a house-painter—called upon him and cadged drinks on the strength of the relationship. This tale is substantiated by Mrs. Conquest's Will, in which she leaves money to her daughter Clarissa Ann, "wife of Charles James Church, known as Charles Dillon."

When only fourteen years old, Charles was stage manager at John Douglass' theatre, the City of London. He then appeared in ballet and small parts at the Surrey under Davidge, and afterwards went out on tour. The name "Mr. Dillon" appears on the Pavilion playbills in the summer of 1838, but this is probably a "T. Dillon" who was playing similar parts at the Garrick a year or two later. From Easter to October 1842, Charles Dillon was again at the City of London (Norton Folgate), playing opposite Miss E. Montague. In February 1843, he and Mrs. Yarnold played together in *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard III*, Tobin's comedy *The Honey-moon*, and 'Monk' Lewis's melodrama *The Castle Spectre*.

Dillon must have been well known by the time he played *Macbeth* for his benefit at the Garrick in August 1843, for he is given star billing with the comment: "Last appearance but three in the East End, owing to engagement at New Theatre Royal, Marylebone."

It was at the Marylebone that Coleman, as a boy of fourteen, had his first glimpse of Clara Conquest and Charles Dillon, whom he describes with a lad's keen vision. He had gone to the theatre expecting to see Elton as Virginius, and was at first disappointed to find that *The Dog of Montargis* had been substituted. But Clara proved a consolation :

"The heroine of the drama, Miss Clara Conquest, was the most charming of village maidens. She was a brunette, with a plump, beautifully balanced figure, dark curling hair, bright sparkling eyes, with just the soupçon of a cast in them, which rather enhanced their sprightliness, teeth like pearls, a mouth like Cupid's bow, a saucy tip-tilted nose, and the daintiest feet and ankles I ever beheld."

Obviously young John had fallen heavily for Clara ; and reading between the lines of his book, it seems that she never quite lost her attraction for him.

If Clara was Beauty, Charles appeared to be the Beast :

"The hero of the night, 'the murdered Aubri,' was enacted by an abnormally ugly young man, whose name did not appear in the bill. This gentleman had a huge, cavernous mouth, with protruding and irregular teeth, a corrugated nose, snake-like glittering eyes, a head of long, lank black hair, growing very low down on a broad but receding forehead, over the brows of which two great bumps projected. In fact, to maintain the semblance of a forehead at all, a quantity of the front hair was shaven off, and, as evidently he was not an adept in the artifices of the toilet, the blue-black mark clearly indicated the exact locality of this tonsorial operation.

"But when Aubri had been on the stage five minutes, I lost sight of his plebeian appearance in my admiration of his ability. He moved with ease, grace and distinction. In his one great, indeed, his only scene, the scene of the murder, his sword-play was magnificent, his pathos and his passion were alike admirable. Such was my first impression of Charles Dillon."

Dillon was kept busy at the Marylebone—not only did he combine the offices of leading man and stage manager, but he also wrote plays, among them *The Heroine of Spain* (September 1843), and *Life's High Ways, or the Sharps and Dupes of the Turf and the Road*, produced in November 1844. While the Marylebone was closed in the summer of 1844, Dillon also wrote, produced and played the title rôle in a version of *Barnaby Rudge* at the Olympic. Coleman credits him with a further four plays (of which he does not give

the dates): *Marco Sciarra, the Brigand of the Abruzzi*, *The Maid of Zaragossa*, *The Mysteries of Paris*, *Night and Morning* (this last an adaptation from Bulwer Lytton).

It has not been possible to document the date of Dillon's marriage to Clara Conquest, or the birth of their daughter Clara. The Somerset House registers came into being in 1837, but for several years registration was not compulsory and the records are incomplete. The nomad life led by the Dillons makes it likely that the entries are lost in some country town of Scotland or Ireland. From internal evidence, it seems that they left the Marylebone together when it closed in the spring of 1844, and that Clara was born early in 1845. (When she died in February 1898, the theatre papers gave her age as fifty, but the cemetery record, which is more likely to be accurate, makes her two years older.) In any case, Clara Conquest played soubrette parts through the 1843 season (Kate Wynsley in *Woman's Love*, Mariette in *Robert le Grange*, the village maid in *The Dog of Montargis*, and an unspecified rôle in *The Broken Heart*); but she was not acting with Dillon when he rejoined the company in November 1844.

It was as Mr. and Mrs. Dillon that Coleman, now himself an actor, met them a few years later at Wolverhampton. He found Dillon's appearance very much improved by a large black moustache which hid his ugly mouth, and which—with the addition in due course of a small imperial—he retained in every rôle, appropriate or not. On this occasion the play was *Othello*, with Dillon as Iago, and Coleman notes that Clara made a very interesting Desdemona.

At Easter 1847 Dillon returned to the Marylebone after an absence of eighteen months, as Don César de Bazan, to be welcomed by crowded and enthusiastic houses. Next autumn he was at Hull, playing *Hamlet*, and *Much Ado about Nothing*, with Clara as his Beatrice. From 1850 onwards he spent most of his time in the north of England, between Sheffield and Manchester. In the Sheffield pantomime of 1850—*The Enchanted Wives, or The Magic Rose and Fishes of the Fairy Queen*—a mazurka danced by Clara was one of the highlights.

The first notice we have found of Dillon in his star rôle of Belphegor comes from the Queen's Theatre, Manchester, in February 1851, where it was said of him:

"Mr. Charles Dillon, as he mellows in the part, improves upon excellence. One great trait in this gentleman's acting is that he never grows jaded by a nightly repetition of the same part. He always plays to render justice to his author, his audience, and himself, and his earnest vigour and intellectual embodiments render him one of the most popular stars in the provinces. Dillon was made for an actor. He is a man of impulse—a profound reader—a warm, generous appreciator of true poetry."

This is interesting, because it contradicts many of the later critics of Charles Dillon's work, who combine to represent him as an actor with great gifts of feeling, but a limited intellectual approach. The *Athenaeum*, commenting, a few years later, on his work in the same part, probably gives a truer estimation of its value:

"Mr. Dillon has a good stage figure, of the middle height, with an expressive countenance and a flexible voice, which enables him to deliver familiar dialogues without effort. He is no declaimer but speaks naturally, and even in phrases of the highest passion is never noisy, substituting intention for stormy vehemence. In these particulars he presents nice points, and differs from nearly all the English artists who have obtained reputation.

"In the first act of the present play he gradually melted his audience from scene to scene, and long ere the fall of the curtain, every eye was moist with sympathetic tears."

In December 1851, occurred one of those episodes which make Dillon a biographer's joy. The paragraph narrating it is headed *Theatrical Paper War at Manchester*, and describes how trouble started with a charge being brought against Mr. Towers, of the Colosseum, Manchester, for acting pieces without a licence. Dillon, who had an interest both in the Theatre Royal, Sheffield, and the Queen's Theatre, Manchester, returned from the former town to hear that he had been accused from the Colosseum stage of having been the informer. Such an insinuation was obviously damaging to his popularity in Manchester, and he retaliated by a placard declaring that the charge was a slander and designating its authors as "myrmidons." The Colosseum manager in his turn produced a large placard headed "Look here upon this picture and on this," with Dillon's repudiation on one side and his own rejoinder on the other. He gleefully pointed out the actor's grammatical errors, making a gratuitous sneer at his "fretting his hour" in Shakesperian rôles.

It was no doubt experiences like these which made Dillon confide to Coleman that he was sick of working in the Provinces, but

there was nothing he could do about it, since in London he would either have to play second fiddle to Charles Kean or Phelps, or else take a theatre of his own.

Meanwhile, these two actors were in fierce rivalry at Sheffield. In 1854 the Theatre Royal was under Coleman's management, but in the following year Dillon took it for the winter season with a first-class repertory, including: *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Belphegor*, *Louis XI*, *Money* (a Bulwer Lytton comedy), *Esmeralda* (from "Notre Dame de Paris,"), *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Stranger*, and *The Corsican Brothers*. As was not uncommon then, they had a female Romeo (Mrs. Wallack); Clara played Juliet, Dillon himself being Mercutio.

*Era Almanack* has some good stories of Dillon at Sheffield. Once an amateur group hired his theatre for a charity performance of *Julius Caesar*. The only professional in the cast was Caesar himself, played by Mr. Courte of the stock company. Mark Antony—a tradesman of the town—was acting under an assumed name, lest his rabidly anti-theatre wife should find him out. But on the night, some sportively inclined friend gave him away, and his wife arrived just as Caesar had been murdered. On the point of delivering his oration, Mark Antony caught sight of her in a menacing attitude: losing his nerve, he dashed off stage and out of the theatre, still in costume. The audience roared, waited for his return, and then, growing impatient, began to shout for the manager. Dillon's explanation was received with an uproar and demands for return of the entrance money.

The manager hesitated a moment; then he had an inspiration—he remembered that Courte had once played Antony to his own Brutus. It struck him that the corpse might be resuscitated, to preach Mark Antony's oration over himself! The fancy tickled him, and advancing to the footlights he suggested this to the audience as the only alternative to dropping the curtain. They agreed unanimously. In reply to shouts: "Now then, Courte lad, up wi'ee an' get to work!" Julius Caesar sprang to his feet, took off the Imperial laurel and mantle and laid them on the stage, to represent the dead Emperor. Then, kneeling beside the garment, he raised his hands heavenwards and commenced the oration:

*O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,  
That I am meek and gentle with these butchers. . . .*

When telling the anecdote, Dillon declared that, notwithstanding the absurdity of the situation, the audience had become

so interested that the laughter subsided after a few lines, and the rest of the tragedy was followed with rapt attention.

On the subject of his guest artists, Dillon could be very amusing as he described their comments on one another. "Who was your last attraction, Mr. Dillon?" inquired Madame Vestris at rehearsal. "Miss Faucit," he replied. "She was here for six nights last month. We did splendid business all the week." "God bless me!" exclaimed Madame, with a shrug of her "enamelled" shoulders, "I never could understand Helen's success. Extremely ladylike, musical voice, tolerable figure—but so wonderfully angular, Mr. Dillon, so *dreadfully* angular. She always reminds me of a wooden doll at the joints."

Charles Kean and his wife came next, and the lady made the usual inquiry as to their predecessor. "Madame Vestris," said the manager. "Madame Vestris!" echoed Ellen Tree in surprise, "That shameless creature as a star! What indelicacy! Of course there were no *ladies* in the boxes?"

Dillon finally engaged Macready for a week, and on stage the morning after his arrival the tragedian asked how the season had prospered, and which artist had proved the biggest "draw." "Really, Sir," replied Dillon, toying with his imperial as usual when in thought, "I have been so fortunate with all my stars, I hardly know to whom to accord the palm. Miss Cushman drew immense houses—the boxes were crowded every night." "Humph!" muttered the tragedian, listlessly turning the . . . of a prompt-book lying by his side. "Then, Mr. Kean's attraction was equally great. On his last night we played to more than——" "Kean, eh?" interrupted the actor, still playing with the book and not raising his eyes from its pages. "Yes—humph—er—well, he had a clever father." "Then," pursued Dillon, "we had Gustavus Brooke on the Doncaster race week, and the house was crowded to suffocation as soon as the doors were opened." "Brooke! Good God!" exclaimed Macready, dropping the book and staring at his manager, as if wondering whether he had heard aright: "Brooke! humph! Noisy, emphatic, guttural—hum—er—hum—not nearly so graceful as Anderson—not nearly so good an actor: and—hum—er—hum—he's an idiot!"

We have already told how Benjamin Conquest helped his son-in-law to oust Coleman, by securing the second Sheffield theatre; and how, thanks to John Oxenford's article after his performance at Sadler's Wells, Dillon found himself famous overnight.



Betty Conquest and "Daphne"  
Inset : Arthur Conquest



Charles Dillon as Othello

*Belphegor* was one of the most popular melodramas of the century. This is how Oxenford describes the play, and Charles Dillon's performance in it: <sup>1</sup>

"The piece selected was a version of *Paillasse*, a drama written by MM. Marc Fournier and D'Ennery for the purpose of showing that a man may have a heart although he is an acrobat by trade, and already rendered familiar to the London public by the acting of M. Frédéric Lemaître.

"The problem proposed by the authors to be solved by the actor is the expression of the most intense feeling, without oblivion of the fact that the sufferer is a mere itinerant mountebank after all, trained among the circumstances peculiar to an art no proficiency in which will attain any amount of social dignity. Now, this problem—by no means an easy one—is, we must declare, solved by Mr. Charles Dillon in a manner most satisfactory, and it is not often that we see such an effect of pathos produced with such a thorough absence of stage tricks. He came in as the vagabond tumbler—neither better nor worse—the street charlatan whose only object in life is to pick up a few coins, less by talent than by bombast and impudence. No attempt was made to refine the character, or to take from it one iota of its appropriate coarseness, and it was only by imperceptible degrees that the despised *Belphegor* grew into an object of absorbing interest. The distresses which harass the man's soul when the wreck of his domestic happiness is threatened, were indicated by satirical touches which commanded sympathy precisely because they did not seem to solicit it, and when the destructive bolt had actually been hurled, and the mountebank, deprived of his wife and youngest child, clasped his elder offspring to his heart, as the only lovable thing in the dreary world, there was an intensity of affectionate grief in the action that was the very perfection of pathos.

"The famous scene in which *Paillasse* attempts—starved in body and blighted in mind—to go through his tricks in the presence of a giddy throng who, thinking his sorrows assumed, merely deride them, was on the same principle of accomplishing the highest elaboration without the least appearance of artifice. The buffoon was haggard and thin, not because he wanted to produce an effect, but because he had had nothing to eat; his voice was broken, not that he might win applause, but because he was—so it seemed—really and truly miserable. We are apt to associate with the provinces the notion of something extremely conventional—the adoption of set forms for every variety of human emotion; but here, as if to dissipate our prejudices, was a most remarkable part, profoundly conceived, and followed into its minutest intricacies

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, April 23, 1856

without the slightest deviation from nature. The various towns in which Mr. Dillon has gained his renown may consider their suffrages increased fifty per cent in value by his *début* on Monday night."

† About Clara, as Belphegor's wife Madeline, Oxenford merely remarks that she is "of an artificial school, but she thoroughly understands the business of the part." The *Illustrated Times* was not so kind to her. Its critic remarks:

"Mrs. Dillon impressed me favourably upon her first appearance, but unhappily failed to realise the expectations thereby created. Mr. Dillon is affected with a severe lisp, which is only perceptible in his louder passages. Mrs. Dillon, as a good wife should, believes in her husband, and so in similar scenes she lisps too. And when both, in some of the outbursts, were lisping against each other, there appeared some slight danger that the audience might supply the missing sibilants . . . Mrs. Dillon appears with her hair elegantly dressed in modern style, among a company of ladies all in white toupées."

From the other side of the curtain, Marie Wilton gives us a most interesting description of Charles Dillon's approach to his part, and his sympathetic consideration of her own suggestions, when rehearsing the play at Bristol a year or two earlier. When one remembers the semi-divine status of the Victorian actor-manager, and the fact that Marie was at the time an unknown child-actress, his open-mindedness is all the more to his credit.

Dillon had reproved Marie for distracting attention from himself by making too much of her own emotion. "You can mean your grief," he said, "but keep it to yourself." "Well, but you are going to say things audibly," protested the girl, "and beautifully you do it, for you make me cry: surely if my sobs and prayers are faintly heard through your speech it must help you, and it will be natural." She begged to be allowed to try the scene through at rehearsal in her own way, and abide by the stage manager's impression of its effect. The manager was moved to tears; so in due course were the spectators. After the performance Dillon said: "Good girl! If ever I have a London theatre, I shall give you an engagement." And he kept his word.

Marie was not happy at the Lyceum, as the London stage manager bullied her; but whenever this came to Dillon's notice he stood up for her. Although so young, Marie was a useful member of the company, who could be relied upon in an emergency. It was thus that she played Perdita, in William Brough's extravaganza of

*A Winter's Tale*, when the actress originally chosen fell ill; later she took over Clara Dillon's rôles of Medora and Virginia. She sat up most of the night learning the latter, and got through it creditably next day. Dillon was very pleased with her and said: "You must study parts like this; you have a pretty, natural style of acting, and I should like to see you one day play Juliet." When she told him that she had already played it as a child, he replied: "Oh, these are exhibitions I would rather not witness. I am glad I was not present." . . . "I didn't like this remark at the time," comments Marie, "but have often thought since how right he was."

Soon after Dillon took the Lyceum that prolific writer Fitzball was strolling near the Chain Pier at Brighton when he met Benjamin Conquest. Telling him the news, Benjamin remarked that his son-in-law was an excellent actor, in Jim Wallack's line, and asked if Fitzball had any play on hand that would be suitable for him. Now, Fitzball had written a comedy, *The Widow's Wedding*, in which "that darling of an actress," Fanny Fitzwilliam, was to have taken the leading part. But she had died very suddenly in the cholera epidemic of 1854, and the play remained unacted. Fitzball sent it to Dillon, who read it in the green-room, before some forty actors and actresses, amid general approbation.

Ill-luck, however, pursued the play. Clara Dillon cast herself for the lead (renamed "Fanny" in memory of the dead actress), and this caused the company's comedienne to resign in dudgeon. The play was put into rehearsal, but it was late in the season, and the theatre closed down before it was ready for performance.

Next year the comedy came up again, and once more there was a hitch. Rehearsals had to be stopped because the fourth act was lost! There were no carbon copies in those days, and the time and effort involved in rewriting the manuscript would have been prohibitive, so it was finally dropped. One would incline to believe that the loss was not altogether accidental, were it not that Coleman reports a similar incident. Going to see *Monte Cristo* in the provinces he found Dillon's own performance first-rate, but noticed that the minor members of the cast were "here, there and everywhere." Afterwards he heard that the prompt-book had been lost and: "the play had been acted without a manuscript, and even without a part, Mr. and Mrs. Dillon telling the people, at their only rehearsal, that they came on here and went off there, and that they had to say 'so-and-so.'"

Fitzball was disappointed at the fate of his play, as he had been looking forward to seeing Clara in the part. He says of her acting that :

"She was very clever in parts of feeling, especially high melodramatic characters—in the wife of Belphegor, for instance; but as I never saw her act anything droll, except in burlesque which is *unnatural*, I cannot at all imagine what she would have done with Mrs. Fitzwilliam's part of Fanny, to which she did me the honour to take such a liking. I can only regret that I did not see her perform it."

Later he adds :

"Mrs. Charles Dillon was not only a pretty actress but a very pretty dancer, of the Duvernay school. . . . In such characters as Medora and Lalla Rookh she realised the poet's romantic dream, and recalled forcibly to the old stager the days of the Peri-like Miss Foote—or that enchantress, Mrs. Farebrother."

Fitzball was not much impressed with Dillon as an actor, considering him "a rough diamond." Belphegor and Claude Melnotte, he admits, were excellent conceptions, but the Shakespearian characters were too vociferous.

The most thoughtful analysis of Charles Dillon's acting comes from Westland Marston<sup>1</sup> whose one-act play, *A Hard Struggle*, had been the chief success of the 1858 season. He says :

"Mr. Charles Dillon was an actor of great emotional gifts, but very deficient in intellectual ones. So long as he was under the influence of feeling, gay or grave, he could act with great power, force and delicacy. In the mountebank Belphegor, a deserted husband, his grief, from the first moment of bewildered, half-stupefied apprehension of his loss, to the full agony of grief, was rendered not only with marvellous power, but with the most minute and subtle touches. A stifled cry as he entered the abandoned room, a sudden transformation as he turned from it, bowed in frame and feeble of limb, mute despair on his face, but no violence, showed fine restraint no less than emotional intensity. But it was the good taste begotten of feeling, which instinctively springs from it, and which does not proceed from those dictates of judgment and reflection, without obeying which, in complex characters, the most passionate actor must be at sea. Charles Dillon often reached psychological truth by an impulse; he had, however, no psychological discernment."

Marston's opinion of Dillon in his favourite Shakespearian characters is that his Hamlet lacked dignity and was careless and hurried in the soliloquies, but that the play-scene and the farewell

<sup>1</sup> "Our Recent Actors," Vol. II, pp. 180 ff.

to Ophelia were rendered with considerable effect and stage-skill. In Othello, finding that he could not rise to the Moor, he adapted the Moor to his own capacities:

"Without majesty, without restraint, with the chafe and fret of passion but without its volume and underswell, he painted the character with doting tenderness, and deplored the supposed betrayal of his love with such moderate resentment that it was surprising he should have avenged it."

With Lear, too, and with Sheridan Knowles's *Virginus*, he dealt in the same way, eliminating to some extent the heroic elements, often missing intellectual points, and devoting himself to the pathetic side of the character.

Marston tells an interesting story about a certain performance of *Macbeth*, when in his agitation at seeing Banquo's ghost the actor clutched his collar, scattering the links of his gorget piecemeal. The effect was remarkable and afterwards Marston heartily congratulated him. Dillon confessed that his action had been an unconscious reflex. "However," he said, "I shall now make it part of my regular business." He did so, but with its spontaneity the gesture lost much of its power.

That Dillon gave an excellent performance as the yeoman farmer Reuben Holt in Marston's play *A Hard Struggle*, we have on the authority of Dickens himself. In a letter to Forster he confesses that he was moved to tears by it: "I would have given a hundred pounds to have played Mr. Dillon's part."

The play, in fact, has an excellent plot, and with a few verbal alterations could be successfully staged today. It tells how Reuben Holt, greeting his fiancée Lilian on her return from a health voyage, finds her subtly changed. The Doctor who has accompanied her on the cruise and saved her life calls to see her, begging her to break her promise to Reuben and marry him instead. Lilian indignantly refuses and sends him away, but the effort is so great that she faints. Imagining that the Doctor has upset her by unwelcome advances, Reuben calls on him in high indignation, but is gradually brought to realise that Lilian really loves the other man and is only remaining true to himself from a sense of duty. He then renounces her: "In a spirit of noble, manly generosity," says Dickens, "that no one should be able to study without great emotion." The end is not altogether unhappy, for we are left with the impression that Lilian's young niece Amy, who adores Reuben, will grow up in due course to be his wife.

Lilian was played by Clara Dillon, and Coleman considered it

one of her best parts: "She gave a little burst of hysterical emotion in one situation of this play, equal to anything I have ever seen." He also notes that "a juvenile member of the Conquest family was charmingly sympathetic as the girl Amy." This refers to Amilie, who was in fact nineteen, but evidently looked no more than the thirteen years with which she was credited in the play—for another critic calls her "a clever little girl." Dickens, too, mentions her indirectly in his letter of congratulation to Marston, speaking of the "subtlety in the comfortable presentation of the child who is to become a devoted woman for Reuben's sake." He was so much impressed with the play that he sent it with a personal recommendation to Regnier, of the Théâtre Français.

One successful single-act play, however, is not enough to carry a theatre like the Lyceum for a whole season, and when Dillon closed down at the end of March, 1858, it was generally felt that his tenure had been a failure. It is significant that during the first season Benjamin Conquest appears as his Acting Manager, but afterwards his name is dropped: no doubt the wily old gentleman saw which way the wind was blowing.

During these two years Dillon played a wide range of parts: Captain Hargreaves in *The Cavalier*, Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons* ("the best," says Fitzball), Raoul in *The Cagot*, D'Artagnan in *The Three Musketeers*, Lord Revesdale in *A Life's Ransom*, George Maurice in *Lady of St. Tropez*, Claremont in *The Artist of Florence*, Reuben Holt in *A Hard Struggle*, Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing*; besides the name-parts in *Belphegor*, *Fabian*, *Othello*, *William Tell*, *Don César de Bazan*, *Virginus*, *Hamlet*, *Richelieu*, *Macbeth* and *Louis XI*.

Clara's rôle is less well defined. She started as leading lady, but after a rather severe attack of influenza in the spring of 1857, she seems to have been gradually superseded. Perhaps hints from the critics that she was "overweighted" when playing opposite her husband had something to do with this. At any rate, during 1857 and 1858, we find Mrs. Woolgar as Ophelia and Helen Faucit as Lady Macbeth; the latter also replaced Clara as Pauline in *The Lady of Lyons* and Beatrice in *Much Ado*. One would suspect that Clara had been restricted to light comedy, were it not that her name appears, right at the end of the 1858 season, as Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger*—a Siddons rôle, for which Clara's size and range must have been woefully inadequate. It is also significant that she accompanied Dillon when, after his first Lyceum season, he went to Drury Lane to play Richelieu, Hamlet and Othello, but not when he returned there in 1860.

After all, it was his father-in-law's money that had enabled Dillon to take the Lyceum, and Clara, after sharing her husband's discomforts in the provinces for years, may have resented being shelved now that he had at last come to Town. This was perhaps a factor in the "dissensions" which, according to Coleman, came to a head just before Christmas 1860, when to his surprise he received a letter from Clara, telling him that she had parted from her husband and asking him for work. He engaged her at once and took advantage of her presence to stage *Belphegor*, on the last day of the year. As he had anticipated, the name of Mrs. Charles Dillon on the programme drew a full house. The sequel may best be told in his own words:

"It so happened that the lady dressed in a room adjacent to mine. I had barely got upstairs after the play, when there arose from the next apartment a scream, which startled and alarmed me. It was followed by the thud of a heavy fall. Then, silence. I knocked at the door, again, and yet again. It was no time for ceremony, so I burst it open. There lay stretched upon the ground the pretty little brunette of my boyhood, now a wan and woe-worn woman. Yes, there she lay, pale, rigid and senseless. Beside her was a telegram with these words: 'Charles Dillon sailed tonight from Queenstown for America.'"

A cynic might reflect that, after a lifetime spent in the theatre, Clara well knew the acoustic properties of dressing-room walls; and that her scream and fall were neatly timed to bring the susceptible Coleman to her help. . . . But making all allowances for an "act," we may still deduce that, however final their parting, she was not indifferent to Charles Dillon.

Clara spent the next few years at the Grecian, where she starred in *The Angel of Death*, *Spring-Heeled Jack*, *The Motto on the Duke's Crest*, *The Lonely Man of the Ocean*, and other plays. As "Mrs. Charles Dillon, from the Lyceum" she looked well upon the bill. Her daughter Clara was now ready to take to the boards, and her first engagement came from Coleman.

Dillon's voyage to America was as disastrous as those of Freer and George Conquest. On the way over, the ship ran into a heavy storm and he had his leg broken in two places; for weeks after his arrival he was helpless, and when at last he could fulfil his engagement in New York he was too lame to make a good impression. He

then went across to San Francisco, only to run into a distressing combination of floods and civil war, which he described vividly in a letter to his daughter published at the time of his death.

For the next eight years he wandered the world: South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Peru, Canada, and back to the United States. Some of his notices are worth quoting as they show his impact on critics less sophisticated than the Londoners, whose approval is always condescending. The Empire critics write, too, in fuller detail, letting us glimpse the mind of the actor working through the character.

Here are two notices from Australia in the early part of 1863, describing his Macbeth and Louis XI. The former was:

"... a totally opposite version from G. V. Brooke's, and a more intelligent one. The idea is that Macbeth is naturally of a generous and noble disposition, and the murder, disturbing his serene generosity, brings immediate remorse. He dies an unbeliever in himself. Dillon's delivery is mellow in tone and completely exempt from rant. His gesticulations and attitudes are both very fine, the former full of natural expression, the latter graceful and picturesque."

Of Louis XI we are told:

"The sudden transition from apparent absorption in penitential duties to the full vitality of worldliness was splendidly illustrated. We have never seen anything much finer on the stage than Mr. Dillon's death-scene in this piece: it is death, not a mere temporary collapse of physical energy preceded by an elaborated struggle on the old conventional plan."

By way of comparison it is tempting to quote an unconsciously droll commentary on the same character by the *Cincinnati Times* in September 1866:

"Mr. Dillon's impersonation of this historical character is perfect, and at times is inspiring, whether in passion, pathos or horror and gives the most resistless provocation of mirth in the loves and follies of the superannuated monarch."

Three more portraits in the gallery come in a careful analysis from Montreal, published in *The Era* on October 14, 1866:

"Mr. Dillon's Hamlet was eminently that of an artist. The philosophic prince of Denmark was, in his hands, a gentleman; there was none of that ranting or roaring about it that is too often made the attribute of this character on the stage. In the closet

scene with the Queen, Mr. Dillon introduces an entirely new style of illustrating the passage commencing: 'Look here upon this picture, and on this . . .' where he compares the merits of his father and his uncle. It is generally done by pointing to a picture on either wall, or by roughly dragging from poor Gertrude's bosom a miniature of her second husband, with one of the late King carried by his son; but Mr. Dillon very wisely made the portraits air-drawn, and, leaning over to his mother's chair, drew them in imagination, by which the effect was greatly increased. The death scene was very fine, and the whole performance was an original, poetical and refined interpretation of, perhaps, the least understood of Shakespeare's heroes."

It is interesting to contrast this with Westland Marston's comment that Dillon lacked dignity of bearing:

"He could ruffle it tolerably in a gaily-slashed doublet, but in Hamlet's mourning weeds he was almost as wanting in presence as in the dress of a gentleman of his own time."

Either the actor had acquired polish in the intervening years, or the Canadian's conception of princely behaviour was less exacting than the Englishman's . . . Continuing, he writes:

"As Othello, Mr. Dillon's acting was magnificent; the Moor's modest consciousness of his felicity in having so great a prize as Desdemona, his tenderness towards her, so admirably contrasted with the severity of his deportment as the soldier best trusted by Venice, his jealousy, so evidently springing from his great love, and the horrid consequences of allowing his simple unsophisticated mind to be misled by the arts of 'honest Iago,' were admirably portrayed. The description before the Senate of how he wooed and won Desdemona was a splendid bit of elocution. In the interviews with Iago, Mr. Dillon introduced some entirely new business. In ordinary performances of *Othello*, Iago and the Moor deliver all their speeches standing before the footlights, after the fashion of schoolboys giving melancholy 'recitations,' but Mr. Dillon went through most of the scenes seated naturally in his chair, with Iago leaning over the table, pouring his insidious hints into his unwilling ears; by which means his outbursts of rage and struggles against conviction, when he rose to his feet, told with much greater effect.

"Of King Lear we have but little space to speak. Mr. Dillon brought out the senile childishness of the old King, who, thirsting for his daughter's love, could not discriminate between profession and sincerity, excellently well. The interview with Cordelia, his much-injured daughter whom, in his madness, he takes for a spirit, was very affecting, the feebleness of the poor old man, quite subdued by the affection of the child he had wronged so much, and the

eagerness with which he clung to the hope of her recovering when, in the last act, he brings her in dead in his arms, were very natural."

Comparing these notices with previous ones in England, one might think that Dillon had, if anything, developed as an artist during his world tour; but more probably the commendation was due to lower standards of comparison, for on his return most critics thought he had retrograded. His delivery had become mannered, his figure had lost much of its grace, and his neck had thickened to a degree that was almost unsightly. Worst of all, he was suffering from a nervous disease which would sometimes, without warning, paralyse his vocal chords, and compel him to drop out in the middle of a performance.

Once back in England he wrote to Coleman, thanking him for his kindness in giving his daughter stage work, and suggesting that they might come together again, after all the disputes that had marred their friendship. Coleman generously responded by an invitation to come and act at Hull. Dillon was billed as Macbeth. When he did not turn up at rehearsal no one was much perturbed; the stock company knew the play, and they went through it with Coleman in the lead. Later in the day a telegram arrived from Dillon, saying that he had suddenly been taken seriously ill. Coleman, sincerely distressed, played for him that night—but next day he heard that Dillon had stopped on at Blackburn to perform *Belphegor*. A further telegram came to announce his "recovery" and suggest that he could play Macbeth later in the week. By then, however, Coleman was so angry that he swore he would never have Dillon in any of his theatres again.

In February 1868, Dillon reappeared at Sadler's Wells as King Lear; but, like Freer before him, he found that younger men had taken his place and that a fickle public had forgotten him, and he was constrained to go back to the provinces. After this he was seldom seen in London, though in 1873 he performed *Manfred* for about a month at the Princess's in Oxford Street. His last appearance in London was in October 1878, when he played *Macbeth* at Drury Lane for his own benefit. Marston saw this performance and reported discouragingly upon it:

"He still retained some physical energy, but his occasional inspiration had deserted him, while his delivery had become stilted and conventional, in brief, of the worst traditional kind."

Misfortune had not broken his spirit, however, as he showed when the house got out of hand at Middlesbrough. The play was

*Macbeth*, and the theatre was full, with people jostling for seats, so that the curtain rose amid shouts of "sit down and make less noise!" The Witches were discovered but unheard. Many interruptions had seemed to make Dillon indifferent rather than ill-tempered, but during his farewell to Banquo the disturbances increased. Sending off Seyton for the murderers with the words: "Bring them before us," he spoke the rest of the line with intention, looking straight at the gallery: "*To be thus is nothing!*" The clamour redoubled. Fully roused now, Dillon came down to the footlights and held up his hand:

"'Ladies and Gentlemen,' said he, 'I think it is better to say "Ladies and Gentlemen," although I adopt the latter phrase more from a feeling of courtesy than a belief in its present fitness—it is very seldom that I venture to address an audience. My respect for them is so great. You can understand then my hesitation before addressing this enlightened assembly. It has been my misfortune to be an actor almost all my life. During that time I have performed in every important town in the English-speaking world. I have had the honour of appearing before the Blood Royal and many foreign potentates, before Princes and Peers, eminent preachers and Prime Ministers. Strange to say, they have been simple enough to be satisfied with my efforts, sometimes rash enough to applaud, and at times insane enough to give me a word of praise. Of course such treatment could come only from such paltry specimens as the élite of Society, and others sufficiently unfortunate to be cursed with poetic feelings and intellectual tendencies. The result of this has been that I think I can interpret Shakespeare—at least, I *thought* I could. Judging from tonight, however, I fear I have been mistaken. Yet, if I might beg you to listen in silence, perhaps I might——' "

Another row broke out in the gallery. Whereupon a loud voice bawled: "Shut up! Danged if I can 'ear 'owt o' this 'ere Shakespeare!" This remark was greeted with guffaws, mixed with shouts of "Order! order!"

"'I see it is impossible,' continued Dillon, 'I deeply regret that I am unable to entertain you. The sincerity of my regret is equal to the excellence of your behaviour. I wish I could make the former as apparent to you as the latter is to me. But I fear I can't! I'm quite in despair! I really don't know what to do. Believe me, if a clog-dance would please you, I'd do it—if I could—but I can't! My education has been neglected. Perhaps you may think that the introduction of a comic song in the banquet scene would be an improvement? Unhappily, singing is not my forte. If I could keep

you quiet by playing the rest of Macbeth on my head, I'd do it, but I can't—the laws of life and gravitation forbid. Since these aids to tragedy are denied me and my efforts to gain a hearing unavailing, I may as well retire. Still, before I go, let me tell you this fact—for I am not likely to appear before you again: I have in my time had all classes for my audience. From the costermonger of Whitechapel to the all-fired irrepressible Yankee, from the rough miners of California, who listened to Shakespeare from the rafters of the building with four feet of rainfall in the pit—right down to the North American Indians, the Aztecs of Mexico and the Flatheads of the West. I have played before Chinese and Niggers, Boers and Kaffirs, Sandwich Islanders and Patagonians, before Bushrangers and Maoris, with an occasional kangaroo for variety; but, from what I see tonight, upon my soul, they were gentlemen compared to you!"

This amazing burst of impromptu oratory must have dumbfounded his hearers, for the play proceeded in comparative quiet.

Dillon was a rapidly ageing man, and in the few years that remained to him he went steadily downhill. In addition to his voice trouble he was suffering from rheumatic gout, aggravated by the rigours of a fit-up tour in outlying parts of Wales. It was in Wales, incidentally, that he married his second wife—Bella Mentrup, daughter of a master-mariner of Hull, who played as his leading lady under the name of Bella Mortimer. The marriage took place by licence at Cardiff in June 1874, with no friends or relatives present, and nothing was heard of it until after Dillon's death, when Bella was left destitute and a collection was organised for her benefit. She was thirty at the time of the marriage—only a year or two older than Dillon's daughter Clara.

A rather ill-natured anecdote dating from about this time couples the names of Dillon and Henry Irving. During the phenomenal run of *Hamlet* at the Lyceum in 1874 the two actors met outside the theatre, which was placarded with bills advertising "Irving as Hamlet." Irving was somewhat nonplussed when Dillon responded to his friendly greeting with a blank stare: "Surely you know me, Mr. Dillon? Why, I had the pleasure of supporting you in several of your provincial engagements." "Ah, yes!" replied Dillon, with a vague and condescending air: "And what are you doing *now*, Irving?"

This tale seems out of key with the man, as revealed to us by Coleman and Westland Marston—an exasperating, irresponsible,

but generous and kindly character. Marston, in fact, tells a story which reveals him in a diametrically opposite light. One of his supporting players considered himself a neglected genius and vastly superior to Dillon. At the end of one act, the two men were left together on stage. If by any chance the minor actor got a good "hand," he would sweep by Dillon to his dressing-room in silence and with an imperious air, as if to say: "The public know who is the better man." But if, as usually happened, his acting fell flat, he would stop for an affable greeting. "Poor dear boy," Dillon would say, when relating this: "Disappointments like this might embitter any man—and, except for his little crotchet, he's a right good fellow."

A brilliant *raconteur*, Dillon was seen at his best among professionals, whom he would treat in a tavern after the show, telling them stories of his adventurous life. He was a frequent visitor at Simpson's, the ~~Abion~~ <sup>Abion</sup>, and the Cock. In Society he was less happy, for he never quite found out how to conform to the Victorian code of manners. He did, however, like to feel that people of importance were interested in his work, and Marston remembers him saying, rather oddly: "I am beginning to be a little proud of my Macbeth. Some lords who were talking to me yesterday spoke very warmly of it."

Among friends, however, he had that easy charm which comes from a kindly disposition. Once when Marston, arriving unexpectedly, caught him on the hearthrug in his dressing-gown, toasting a bloater, he was not in the least confused, but remarked cheerfully: "I don't know anything that needs more careful cooking than a bloater. I'm first-rate at it, and as soon as I've got this fellow off my fork, I'll do another for you."

All his life he had the unconventionality of the strolling player, and he used to embarrass the members of his company by carrying the day's takings around in a handkerchief or newspaper, and publicly sharing them out in a bar or on a railway platform.

As a manager, says Marston, Dillon was kind and indulgent but no disciplinarian: in no other company were unpunctuality and absences at rehearsal so rife, or the penalties so light and infrequent. Dillon was famed for his speed and skill in arranging the "pictures" or tableaux on which it was customary to ring down the curtain. The following anecdote on this subject may be true and is certainly *ben trovato*:

An Indian drama was to be performed, and Dillon had only just arrived in the town, as the particular star of the piece. The

stage manager, addressing him, said: "Mr. Dillon, will you please arrange the battle between the Sailors and the Indians?" Dillon, who was in a hurry to dine with a friend, replied: "Easiest thing in the world. Come, lads—everybody on stage. Now, every Sailor have an Indian down. Light your red fire. Picture. Curtain. Who's going Bath-Road way? You? Thank you. Good day. The dinner will be cold." And off he went.

The closing years of Dillon's life were spent in third-rate provincial tours, with an increasing sense of failure and frustration. His friends noticed the gloom that he displayed when off stage, and realised that he was a disappointed man.

Death came to him with a charitable swiftness. It was at the little border town of Hawick, where on the night of his arrival he had performed *Othello* to a half-empty house. Afterwards he came and sat on the stage, waiting for the acting manager to share out the takings. He brooded, silent and despondent, while a young actor passed the time by strumming gaily on the piano. When he had finished, Dillon said to him with a sigh: "You have a light heart—a light heart, Sir. How I envy you!"

Next day he had recovered his spirits. The notices were good, and business would probably be brisker for the rest of the week. As was his custom, he stood drinks to the company and entertained them with anecdotes of his travels; then, in the best of humours, they sallied out to explore the town. Talking and laughing, they reached the middle of the High Street. Suddenly Dillon paused, put his hand to his head, exclaimed: "God! Can this be death?" And as he spoke he fell.

So instinctively graceful was he, said one of his companions, that in the very act of death he dropped in a classic attitude, like Caesar at the base of Pompey's statue.

They brought him back to London and buried him in Brompton Cemetery. Whatever the rights and wrongs of his breach with Clara may have been, it is evident where the Conquests' sympathies lay, for not one member of the family was present at the funeral—in fact, the only relative there was his daughter's husband, Henry George. One is tempted to wonder whether one of the "pale, weeping women" whom Coleman watched strewing flowers on his grave was Clara; but surely, even if the reporters had missed her, Coleman himself would have recognised his "little brunette with the twinkling feet," however much altered by grief and time?

Dillon's grave is marked by a flat stone, from which every vestige of inscription has been eroded. It lies about a hundred yards inside the north entrance of Brompton Cemetery, near which is a large red granite monument to Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft. Turning down a narrow path beside this vault, one finds a headstone engraved with names of a family called Gubbins, and the stone beyond it is Dillon's. The irony of fate has pursued him to the end: he can little have thought when, as manager of the Lyceum, he gave Marie Wilton her first London part, that one day his grave would be located only by reference to her own imposing tomb.

The two women who shared Charles Dillon's life also lie alone in unmarked graves. Although so much the younger, Bella was the first to go. She was only forty-two when she died in 1886, at her native Hull, after a long illness. Clara survived her for two years, dying quite suddenly of a stroke, at her son-in-law's house at Southsea.

Ten years later, Clara the younger died at Scarborough, at the comparatively early age of fifty-two. Her name appears in one or two Grecian playbills towards the end of 1872, and again at the Surrey in 1890, as Bridget Maloney in *The Harbour Lights*. Also she wrote three plays in the true melodramatic tradition: *A Fight for Life*, in which she made her last stage appearance, *The Human Tiger* and *The Silent Foe*. In the last-named she collaborated with her younger son, who used the professional name of Edward Ranier. (The elder, taking his grandfather's name, called himself Henry Dillon.) Like her great-aunt Ann, Clara died of bronchial asthma. She had been out of health for some months, but her final collapse, on February 29, 1898, was unexpectedly sudden. She lies buried in Scarborough cemetery, and with her the recorded history of the Dillons comes to an end. We have not been able to trace the careers of her sons, or find out whether they have left any descendants.

## CHAPTER XX

### *The Dysons and the Broomheads*

"HAPPY is the Nation that has no history," it has been said—and the same applies to individuals. By contrast with the star-crossed Dillons, the Conquests' younger daughters and their families were cheerful, normal people about whom there is little to say.

The middle sister, Laura, was the best dancer. She appeared as a child at the Grecian in ballets such as *Flora and Zephyr* and *Jason and Medea*; then, after a break for education (upon which the Conquests laid a stress which was at the time quite unusual), came back to help her mother with the dancing school and to play in pantomime. Between 1861 and 1865 we have notes of her as the Fair One in the pantomime of that name, as Sunflower in *The Spider and the Fly* (1862), Pearl of the Sea in *Robinson Crusoe* (1863), Princess Rosebud in *Punch and Judy* (1864), and Princess Paragon in *The Bottle Imp* (1865). During 1865 she also appeared in the ballet *Aurora*, the opera *Masaniello*, and one straight part—little Josephs in *It's Never Too Late to Mend*.

In September 1866 she married Henry Dyson and went to live in Sheffield, at which point her theatrical career ended. One or two glimpses from *The Era* are all that we have of Laura and Isabella. For example, in *Robinson Crusoe*:

"The Misses Conquest are very attractive by their pretty poses and charming figures, and the graceful movements of Pearl of the Sea are seen to their greatest advantage in a beautiful scene where the 'Grand Indian Ballet' takes place, and before which a host of ladies and the pupils of Mrs. Conquest appear."

In *The Spider and the Fly* also Laura was the leader of a fairy ballet by her mother's pupils.

Of her children, the two girls Laura and Amy both went to the Surrey and remained there for several years. Laura Dyson was principal girl in its pantomimes from 1889 to 1897, with only one break, and she was also a useful *soubrette*.



Cissy Farrell

*Photo from "The Era", July 2, 1904*

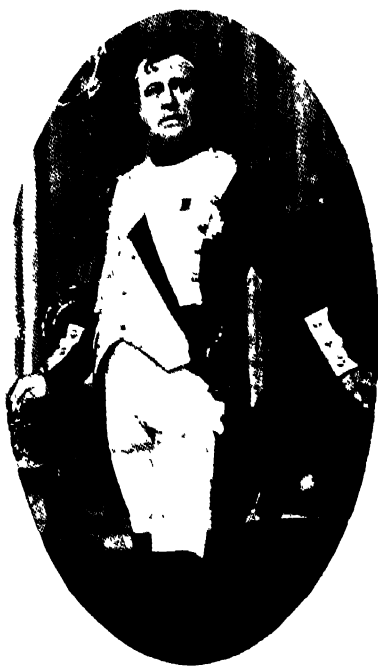


George Conquest, 1895

## Napoleon Bonaparte



Edward Gomersal  
(*Astley's*, 1824)



Frank Lister  
(*Lycium*, 1911)

The Three Napoleons

A very pleasant glimpse of Laura in her early days at the Surrey has been given to us by Ida Millais, daughter of the younger John Douglass, who shared a dressing-room with her and Cissy Farrell in a sensational drama called *A Dark Secret*. This was Douglass' adaptation of Sheridan Le Fanu's novel "Uncle Silas," which retained the central situation of a young girl in the power of her sinister uncle (played, of course, by George Conquest), while changing the names of the characters and the setting of the story. The great sensation was the second act, which portrayed Henley Regatta, complete with "real water, real boats, racing craft, houseboats and steam-launches"—all imported from the original production at the Standard. In this scene Mrs. Bennett, playing the heroine's step-sister and protector, was nightly flung into the water by the villains of the piece. On the first night, when she took a call before the footlights with water streaming from her dress, says *The Era*, "the house fairly rose at her."

Ida, then about eighteen, played the persecuted Nelly; Cissy was a gipsy girl, and Laura a vagrant. The three, who were all taking singing lessons from the same master at the Guildhall School of Music, were great friends. Charming young girls, each in her different way: Ida with her innocent, open face and light-brown hair (it is white now, but still thick and curly—and sixty years have not faded the forget-me-not blue of her eyes); Cissy, pale and quiet, with dark curls tied back by a ribbon, usually sitting in a corner, her head bent over a book or a script; and Laura filling the dressing-room with laughter, chatter and snatches of song. She was slightly older than the others, and she had a pull over them, for she had just become engaged. And she was pretty, in an obvious style that eclipsed her cousin's more subtle good looks: a figure like Clara Dillon's—plump and dainty at the same time; bright gold curls, and a complexion like the pink roses that she loved to wear.

Last left of the "Three Little Maids from School," Ida used to smile reminiscently as she recalled Laura's radiant vitality and happiness in those days. Their friendship continued to the end of their lives. Laura died in Brighton in 1950 at the age of eighty and Ida quite suddenly, of a heart attack, in May 1952.

Laura's chief asset was a really fine singing voice, well above the average pantomime level. One of her best notices was in the 1891 pantomime, *The Fair One with the Golden Locks* (in which, as we have seen, her mother also had played principal girl).

"The representative of Florinda is Miss Laura Dyson, who combines with personal charms appropriate to the part an ingenuous style and an artless and impulsive manner that are excessively winning. She has a good voice and uses it well."

In straight plays Laura usually afforded the comedy relief—such as Louisa Ann in *The English Rose*; Jenny Ripon in *Our Native Home* ("pretty, pleasing and piquante," we are told, "and her complete abandon was quite exhilarating"); and Sally Jenkins ("Sammy's 'ope and 'appiness") in *The World's Verdict*.

Laura stayed on at the Surrey for several years after her marriage to Herbert Leonard. She was obliged to miss the 1896 pantomime, soon after which she gave birth to a son, but she played the following year in *The Yellow Dwarf*. In the autumn of 1898 her boy died, and George Conquest—well knowing that the best panacea for grief is work—wrote in a part specially for her when revising *The Angel of Death*—a bright, saucy part, into which she bravely threw herself, looking as pretty and cheerful as ever. Besides this child, Laura had three daughters, one of whom inherited the family talent for dancing. She continued at the Surrey until towards the end of 1899, one of her last appearances there being in her husband's drama *On Active Service*.

The younger sister, Amy Dyson, was not so pretty or so talented as Laura, but she was a good little trouser. A revealing note about her is given in *The Stage's* description of *Sinbad* (1896):

"Miss Dyson, in spite of some interruption from an impatient gallery on Saturday, persevered in a sentimental song and dance." It is only fair to point out that to be given "the bird" in these conditions was not necessarily a reflection on the singer, but merely an indication that the house wanted to get the song over and come to the main attraction of the evening—the great Transformation scene.

Benjamin Conquest's youngest daughter Isabella was the first of the family to marry outside the theatre. Her future husband, Henry Broomhead, was a law-student from the North who was staying in Islington to take his examinations. There he must have visited the Grecian and seen the lovely young girl as the Spirit of Pantomime in *Robinson Crusoe*—in which, says *The Era*, she "warbled, articulated and gesticulated charmingly."

Henry's father, solicitor in an old-established Sheffield firm, had died in 1857; so the young man, once qualified, was independent and in a position to take a wife. He and Isabella were married at

Brighton in 1865. To this town-bred girl, still only twenty years old, the ceremony in the parish church of Hove, on an October morning, with the golden-brown autumn foliage and a fresh wind blowing in from the sea, must have seemed like a stage-set. She had her father to give her away, and Laura for her bridesmaid, and a reception afterwards in the little house in West Street. And so she went up to Sheffield and turned her back for ever on London and the theatre.

If Isabella ever felt homesick, she must have been glad to have her sister in the same town during the first few years of her married life. Her eldest son, Henry Oliver Broomhead, who became a solicitor in his turn, was born at Sheffield in 1866; her daughter Isabella and Laura Dyson were both born there in 1870. Then the Broomheads moved up to Bakewell, in the Peak District, where Henry had a circuit of several towns.

Latest born of Benjamin Conquest's children, Isabella was the first to go. She was only forty-two when she died at Bakewell in November 1887.

Isabella, her daughter—a very pretty, red-haired girl—used to stay with George Conquest's children in her holidays, and in 1892 she came to the Surrey, in the name of "Issy Behring." She was a great sport, if only a minor actress. In *Cinderella* (1893) she is mentioned as "an attractive little Bo-Peep," but as a rule her name only occurs in the collective rubric: "Other parts were effectively played by . . ."

The best anecdote of Isabella Broomhead is an off-stage one. It happened soon after Kate Vernon had come to the Surrey—and before she had the status that accrued to her as Fred Conquest's wife. Now at that time it was as essential for a rising young actress to have a parlour-maid as it would be unusual nowadays. Kitty (as she was called) was expecting a visit from an Agent whom she hoped to impress. But, alas! she could not afford a maid. Taken into her confidence, "Issy" volunteered to come to the rescue. With the connivance of the wardrobe mistress, they borrowed an attractive uniform, complete with cap and apron. In due course tea was served, with much unnecessary ringing of bells and issuing of orders by Kitty, and much bobbing and "Yes, Ma'am" from Issy. They carefully avoided each other's eyes, for giggles were very near the surface. As soon as the duly impressed Agent had been shown out, both of them broke into peals of laughter. . . . And this cheerful note is the point at which we say goodbye to the Broomheads.

## CHAPTER XXI

### *The Farrells and the Listers*

THE cleverest actress of the Conquest sisters was undoubtedly Amilie; though perhaps this verdict is hardly fair to the others, since she was able to develop her talent up to the age of twenty-five, whilst they married at the outset of their careers.

Amilie was at the Grecian from 1851 onwards. She danced in the ballets, and her tiny figure enabled her to go on playing children long after she was grown-up. It was as the child Amy in *A Hard Struggle* at the Lyceum that she attracted general notice. Her fresh, sincere acting in the part of the girl whose candid chatter inadvertently shows Reuben that his fiancée loves another man, was a main factor in the success of the play.

Returning to the Grecian with a West End label, Amilie found the critics predisposed towards her. She played Marie Wilton's Lyceum parts of Henri in *Belphegor* and Perdita in W. Brough's burlesque—"with the taste and skill of a true artiste," comments *The Era*.

Of her performance in *It's Never Too Late to Mend*, it was said:

"We were greatly pleased with Miss A. Conquest's pathos and dramatic feeling in the part of the poor boy Josephs. It was only a single scene, but in that she made a powerful impression on her audience."

Amilie also had a comedy sense, as she showed by her richly humorous performance as the Nurse to the royal babies in *Harlequin Guy Faux*; and again in the pantomime of 1859, *Harlequin Valentine and Orson*.

Her success led to offers from outside. Benjamin Conquest strongly discouraged his son from playing in other theatres—probably fearing that the lure of the West End might detach him altogether—but he does not seem to have taken the same line with his daughters: no doubt he reckoned that in any case he would lose them when they married.

Not unnaturally, Amilie's unusual christian name baffled the

compilers of playbills. We find her as Amelie, Amelia, Amalia and Amy. The family saved trouble by calling her "Ammy." It was as Amy Conquest that she was billed at Birmingham, for the pantomime of 1863, where she met her future husband. Henry Farrell was a member of the Prince of Wales theatre stock company; but all we know of his career is the tradition of his good looks, and a brief note in *The Era* that he was "worthy of encomiums" for his rendering of Henry Mowbray in the comedy *Like and Unlike*.

Once married, Amilie settled down with characteristic efficiency to produce and bring up a family of two tall sons, as handsome as their Irish father, and three slim little daughters—typical Conquests. The eldest, Clara—always called Cissy—was the prettiest. Amy, the second, was a replica of her grandmother Clarissa: wide mouth, upturned nose and curly dark hair—a gay, friendly girl, with dash and verve. The youngest, Laura, who is still alive, was the cleverest, but the stage did not attract her.

Cissy joined the Surrey while still in her early teens. She made her début on August bank holiday, 1886, in the tiny part of Liz in *Hoodman Blind*. For the first eighteen months she was typed either as the "waif," male or female—for which her slight figure and rather fey prettiness were particularly suitable—or as the ingénue: Little Loo in *The New Babylon*, the cabin-boy Ned in *The Black Flag*, Clara Selby in *The Green Lanes of England*, Marie Guérin in *The Strangers of Paris*. Her first chance as a dramatic actress came towards the end of 1887, in *A Dead Man's Gold*, when she played Burette—a gangster's moll who repents, arranges the escape of the heroine, and is shot in her stead.

Cissy's acting was of the quiet type that makes its mark gradually but surely. She had been at the Surrey nearly two years before the critics took any real notice of her; then, on her second appearance in *The Green Lanes of England*, *The Era* noted:

"Miss Cissy Farrell, a young lady who has become one of the regular company at the Surrey and who has been steadily improving ever since she first joined its ranks, is a prepossessing and agreeable Clara Selby. Her delivery is good and she promises to make still further progress."

Two months later, in *Youth*, the commendation was repeated:

"A word of distinct praise and encouragement is due to Miss Cissy Farrell, whose perseverance and intelligence have had the usual result of such virtues and have made her a valuable and accomplished member of Mr. Conquest's company."

In the spring of 1889 Cissy obtained an outside engagement and her absence was noted as a distinct loss. When she returned, it was to play a succession of *soubrette* parts. With increasing technique she was developing a comedy sense. She was usually teamed up with young George Conquest—on the principle, presumably, that a large fat comedian is funnier when playing opposite a slim little one. They made a very good couple, though occasionally the critics complained that Cissy was overweighted by her burly partner. Of their acting in *Mankind*, *The Era* wrote:

“The appearance of Mr. George Conquest, Jr., as Barnaby Bright, in coster’s holiday attire, with pearl buttons very much in evidence, is alone sufficient to convulse the house, but this is added to by his clever accentuation of all the expressive mannerisms peculiar to the class. He is ably assisted by Miss Cissy Farrell, who, as Arabella Bright, works with an energy and evident sense of humour that is responsible for much of the applause they obtain.”

In *My Jack* they played Pat Doolan, an amorous sailor, and his sweetheart Mary Ibertson, landlady of the Bambridge Arms; whilst in *The Miser’s Will* Cissy had a sparkling part as the chambermaid, Sally Lunn.

By the summer of 1890, “the Guv’nor” thought his niece ready to tackle a leading rôle. He tested her as the village schoolmistress, Mary Northcote, in *The Bells of Haslemere*. *The Era*, ranking her among “the principal Surrey favourites,” found her “pretty and sympathetic”; but *The Stage* said frankly that “the part requires an actress of greater emotional powers than Miss Farrell as yet possesses, but still she played feelingly in her chief scenes.” Wisely, therefore, her uncle put her back to comedy for another year.

There is a pleasant glimpse of her in the 1890 pantomime—*The Sleeping Beauty*:

“Miss Cissy Farrell, looking charming in pale blue, is a dainty and pretty Murette, tripping it and singing whenever occasion requires with vivacity, and with apparent pleasure to herself.”

It was during 1890 that Cissy’s future husband, Frank Lister, took to the stage. Son of a schoolmaster at Calverley, this sturdy Yorkshireman came to the theatre the hard way. He was originally placed in the City, but spent his evenings working back-stage until he managed to get two small parts (Tiny Spurts and Ah Luck, the Chinaman) in a North Country tour of *The New Babylon*. His first appearance was at Rotherham on November 22, 1890.

The following year gave Cissy Farrell a range of varied parts : a middle-aged woman in *The World Against Her*—for which she looked far too young, and was gently reminded that she must be prepared to sacrifice her appearance in the interests of artistic truth; the heroine's plucky friend, Nancy Drake, in *A Ring of Iron*; two young boys—Tom Chickweed in *Alone in London*, and the cabin-boy Ned in *The Black Flag*; and the heroine in *Flying from Justice*. This time *The Stage* found that she had risen to the occasion, showing signs of "the growing nervous force and power that promise so much for her career as an emotional actress."

In Herbert Leonard's play *Light Ahead*—of which one critic dryly remarked that "it proceeds on its course for a considerable time without any light ahead whatever as to how it is to turn, or in what manner it will end"—Cissy again played "a winning and womanly heroine," and from this time onwards she reckoned as a fully-fledged performer.

The first time Frank Lister and Cissy Farrell acted together was in the 1891 pantomime, *The Fair One with the Golden Locks*, which was below the usual Surrey standard. The man remained unnoticed, except in the cast-list where his name was misspelt, and the girl merely received a brief mention, that she looked well in her black silk costume as King Crow.

Frank Lister then played some oddly-assorted character parts : the dignified Sir Philip Kingston in *The English Rose*; a comic scoundrel, Darby Quick, in *A Man in a Thousand*; and the venerable and pathetic Ralph Greyling in *A Village Forge*. (This Methuselah, incidentally, was still only twenty-three.)

It was in Boucicault's Irish play *Arrah-na-Pogue* that they both scored their biggest successes to date. Cissy, with her Irish parentage, was perfectly cast in the name-part : she looked like a colleen, and her singing of the roguish little song "Coming from Kildare" stopped the show. As the informer, Michael Feeney, Lister had a difficult part to play and a high standard to compete against—for many of his audience must have seen the grand performance given by Sheil Barry at the Adelphi. *The Era*, for the first time, showed true appreciation :

"Mr. Frank Lister has only recently joined the Surrey ranks, but he has already made his mark, and his Michael Feeney should further enhance his reputation. The hateful little informer has been most cordially hated, so well has Mr. Lister depicted his sneakishness and his rascality."

George Conquest, too, must have realised that the real stuff of the theatre was in this young man. He himself had retired by this time, and he began to try Lister out in some of his own old parts. In their full-blooded style of acting, their mastery of make-up, and their enjoyment in representing abnormal characters, the two men were very similar. Before he learned to control his superabundant energy, Lister's performances appealed more to the Surrey-siders than to the connoisseurs. Indeed, he might well have said, paraphrasing Edmund Kean: "Damn the critics—I tell you, *the pit rose at me!*" Sometimes his impact upon two different reviewers would be diametrically opposite, so that one would praise him for the very quality which the other disliked. Thus we have two nicely contrasted notices of his performance as a rustic villain in 1893. The play was called *In the Moonlight* and was about poaching. Here is *The Era's* opinion:

"There is at least one character that is drawn with praiseworthy skill. We refer to Peter Grindell, and we have praise not only for the author but for the actor, Mr. Frank Lister, who put into his work both grim humour and tragic intensity. '*To—be—sure*' is a phrase that is constantly on Peter's tongue, and in the drawling forth of it Mr. Lister gives to it a flavour of fiendish malignity. That he has been hissed and hissed vigorously will be readily understood, for the Surrey gods are virtuous, but the performance has been one of sterling worth and should go far to enhance the actor's reputation."

And here is the same character as viewed by *The Stage*:

"Made up cleverly, but perhaps looking too uncouth and hideous, Mr. Frank Lister unfortunately marred a telling performance by his tendency to exaggeration; and his perpetual reiteration of the catch-phrase '*To be sure,*' spoken with broad country accent, soon became very tedious indeed."

If Frank Lister's early work had the joyously extrovert quality of an artist splashing poster-colours on a wall, Cissy Farrell's was more like a Chinese painting on silk. This is how *The Stage* describes her performance as the parson's daughter, Mary Maythorne, in a racing melodrama called *A Million of Money*:

"For deftness and delicacy of touch and refinement of style it would be hard to find anyone who does better work than Miss Farrell. In such a rôle as this, more is needed than a graceful and pleasing presence to secure such high results as Miss Farrell

secured on Monday night. There is needed the true art of the actor ; and, to show that she possesses this, one has only to point out the extreme naturalness of her playing in the most moving scenes."

Two such opposite personalities were obviously made to complement each other, but it was several years before they became engaged.

Meanwhile they continued to develop their talent—the man learning restraint, and the girl gaining in projection and power. The part in which Surrey audiences demanded to see her again and yet again was Walter Hatherleigh—the lad in *Driven from Home* who narrowly escapes death in a saw-mill—which she played with "a boyish bounce and fearlessness." Maybe the extraordinary popularity of this melodrama was due to situation rather than acting ; and the same applies to *A Ring of Iron*, where Cissy, as the gallant Nancy Drake, received "thunderous applause" on rescuing the heroine from a lunatic asylum and horse-whipping a cruel nurse. Considered praise, however, came from the critics for her work in difficult parts, which might easily have become ridiculous, without her tact and charm. Thus, in *Our Native Home* (described as "a crude and curious piece, some fifty years out of date") she played a blind heroine, Rosey Cherrytree—"a rather pragmatic damsel who talks with copy-book sententiousness"—who, escaping from the villain's embraces, falls into the sea and is rescued in the bucket of a dredger ! Of her work in this part, *The Era* says :

"Miss Cissy Farrell played the blind heroine with a gentle grace which won all hearts, and the delicacy of her treatment of the character, and the emotional ability she displayed in the softer passages, secured for her the hearty sympathy of the audience."

Again, in a shockingly bad play called *Phantoms*, in which most of the characters, for no cogent reason, masquerade under false names, she had to be a young woman named Tess, who suffers seduction and many miseries before dying of consumption. The newspapers made merry with the plot, especially the fifth act, in which the villain goes mad and sees a vision of his victims—apparently four of the cast standing behind a gauze curtain ! But they took Cissy seriously :

"The Tess of Miss Cissy Farrell is one of her very best performances, full of sympathetic touches, wistful, wan, appealing, consistently natural, and not lacking in a certain gentle force."

A month later she had a similar part in a better-written play—*Shall We Forgive Her?*

"The chief character is very sympathetically drawn, and certainly no Surrey playgoer can help feeling for the trials of Grace West, who, wishing to wipe out the memory of a bitter past by a life of devotion and love, is betrayed by one of her own sex. Miss Cissy Farrell in the more tranquil episodes of the character is particularly sweet and winsome, and her dignity and elevation in the trying scene between Grace and Oliver are conspicuous."

By 1895 any specially sweet, gentle or well-bred heroine was habitually entrusted to Cissy Farrell; but that spring she gave the critics a pleasant surprise by proving that she could act against type. In *The Work Girl* she was warmly commended by *The Stage* for a realistic study of what Victorians considered a thoroughly nasty woman:

"Evelyn Sephton is a part quite out of Miss Cissy Farrell's usual line, and all the more credit is therefore due to her for the marked skill and success with which she presented one most advanced of 'New Women'—cigarette-smoking, fast-club-haunting, impudent, hard and unlovable."

Other parts in which Cissy was impressive were two studies of women driven mad by grief—Margaret Maitland in *Tommy Atkins* and Jenny Warden in *The Girl of My Heart*; and three "little boy" rôles—"Shakespeare" Jarvis in *The Lights o' London*, Pietro in *A Daughter of Ishmael*, and (following in the footsteps of her mother and her aunt) Josephs in *It's Never Too Late to Mend*.

As for Frank Lister, he played a chameleon-like range of parts, from the charitable and sympathetic Rev. Arthur Lulworth in *Human Nature*, to the villainous foreman, "Humpy" Logan, who is roasted alive in *Master and Man*. Here are some examples: Burly Mike, the Australian miner, in *A Ring of Iron*; the greybeard, Bo'sun Bill, in *Our Native Home*; Gregson Bates, a comic detective, in *Time, the Avenger*; the benevolent Mr. Wood in *Old London*; the sly Greek, Ciro Panitza, in *My Jack* (a George Conquest part); the murderous steam-hammerman Silas Slagg in *True as Steel*; Cass Kennedy, the villain in *Sons of Erin*; the French valet, Gaspard Dobré, in *A Lion's Heart*; the miser Gandelou in *The King of Clubs*; the Jew Isaacs in *Queen's Evidence*—a humorous part, originally played by the younger George Conquest; the Vicar of Beechley in *Youth*; the pathetic old schoolmaster Jacob Winter in *A Daughter's Honour* (his daughter had lost hers!); the blacksmith Cripps in *The Silver King*; Ikey Shaw, the convict, in *The Broad Arrow*; the heroine's kind friend, Dr. Whitley, in *The Cruel City*; the murderer,

Gipsy Jim, in an unintentionally comic piece called *A Daughter of Ishmael*—where, having dragged his victim's body across the stage and thrown it into a lime-kiln, he is confronted with her double (played by the same actress), announcing that *she* is the supposedly dead woman!

Lister gets frequent praise for his versatility and his skill in make-up, but throughout 1893 and 1894 he is constantly told not to overact; from 1895 onwards we find the adjectives "powerful," "incisive," "energetic," and occasionally "restrained." Three or four of his performances were remarkable. His Old Man of the Sea in *Sinbad* has already been described.

In *The World's Verdict* Lister played a crazy inventor, Nathan Black, who needs a human sacrifice for the machine which he is constructing, and almost succeeds in decapitating the heroine. "Mr. Frank Lister's Nathan Black is one of the most weird and powerful studies we have seen for some time," said *The Stage*; while *The Era* expanded on the subject:

"The part of the crazy inventor is one that Mr. George Conquest, Sr., would have revelled in; but, failing him, it is splendidly played by Mr. Frank Lister. His make-up is a clever study, and the affection he expresses for the children of his brain, the feverish anxiety to secure a victim for his masterpiece, and the hellish delight when he has acquired an offering to his Moloch, are depicted with wonderful effect. The rôle is a most fatiguing one, but Mr. Lister carries it through to a successful climax."

And the revival in 1896 was greeted with even more appreciative notices:

"Mr. Frank Lister . . . acts with dramatic power and is at times intensely realistic in his methods."

"Nathan Black is one of the most impressive in Mr. Frank Lister's gallery of character creations. A weird, uncanny creature is this mad genius, who has spent many of the best years of his life in perfecting his machine, and who is hungering for a victim on which to test its powers. And with what hellish delight the offering to his Moloch is received. The exhausting part is splendidly played by Mr. Lister, who well deserves the enthusiastic call that rewards him at the conclusion of the trying scene."

In the same year Lister, who was rapidly approaching the peak of his powers, gave two good performances in lighter vein—as "Shoulders" in *The Raid in the Transvaal*, and as Paddy Molloy in *Tommy Atkins*. Of the former it was said by *The Era*:

"Mr. Frank Lister furnished an exceedingly telling and graphic delineation of the dram-drinking cripple called 'Shoulders,' the effects of intemperance being perceptible in the bloated red face and the shambling gait. In the second act he gives a Coupeau-like display of the results of hard drinking upon a brain already diseased by frequent excesses, winning much applause by his powerful acting."

Very different in style was Paddy Molloy :

"A 'rollicking broth of a bhoy' is Paddy, and Mr. Lister plays as lightly and as drolly as though he had never acted any but similar parts during his stage career."

The play was revived in the following year (1897), when Lister is congratulated on his "rich and 'illigant' brogue."

In the spring of 1897 handsome Fred Conquest, who had been for several years the major "heart-throb" among the Surrey girls, announced his engagement to Kate Olga Vernon, a new recruit to the company.

The wedding of "the Guv'nor's" popular son was, of course, an event; there were congratulations, notices in the stage papers, a presentation at the theatre. Amid all the fuss, the engagement and marriage of Frank Lister and Cissy Farrell passed almost unnoticed. Both couples honeymooned during the summer recess, and came back to the Surrey for the autumn season.

The year that followed brought no outstanding rôle to Cissy Farrell; but an accident to the leading man, Ernest Norris, gave her husband the chance, for once, of acting the hero instead of the villain—Frank Earlsworthy in *An English Woman*. At Christmas he gave a striking performance in the name part of *The Yellow Dwarf*; while Cissy in this, her last pantomime, played the wicked fairy Haridan.

In *The Motto on the Duke's Crest* Lister reverted to villainy—but this time in the grand manner, as the Duc de Gonzague. He looked very handsome, we are told; his acting was polished to a degree, and he displayed the care, earnestness and force which had become his distinguishing qualities.

Perhaps it was this performance that attracted the attention of Isaac Cohen, manager of the Pavilion. At any rate, when the season ended Lister left for the Pavilion, where he stayed, with absences on tour and in pantomime, for the next five years. His wife con-

tinued for a while at the Surrey. During the autumn of 1898 she starred in a revival of George Conquest's old Grecian drama *The Angel of Death*. This strange production gave her a chance to show her quality as an actress:

"In the course of the play the beautiful and bat-like apparition, almost 'clad in white samite, mystic, wonderful,' is seen in such varied phases as those of the Angel of Providence, the Goddess of Love, and the Angel of Justice; and in each one of these Miss Cissy Farrell plays with impressive grace and appreciative sense of the uncanny. This ranks as one of the very best impersonations of this well-beloved Surrey favourite."

It would be pleasant to think that Cissy's long connection with the Surrey had ended on this exalted note; but in fact she played several more parts: Mad Jenny in a revival of *The Girl of my Heart*; the heiress Marcia Dudley in *The War of Wealth*; Mildred Parkes in *Flying from Justice*—in which, we are told, she showed all her charm and tenderness: "the sympathy of the audience is with her in her trials, and the tears and cheers that she evokes are spontaneous and hearty." Once more, for the fifth and last time, she played Walter Hatherleigh; then came her final part—the smart, unpleasant Edith Price in *Half-Mast High*.

In April 1899 her son Francis was born, and in August she joined her husband in *Brother for Brother* at the Pavilion. For the next few years they played sometimes together and sometimes apart. One of Lister's successes was his impersonation of the Octopus in the Liverpool pantomime *Octorine*. Cissy reached the West End in a series of matinées at the Globe and Vaudeville theatres, and then returned to the Pavilion to play a light comedy part in *The Fatal Card*. Afterwards she fulfilled a starring engagement at the Elephant and Castle theatre for several weeks; then appeared under the management of Richard Mansell at the Brixton Theatre and Terriss', Rotherhithe. In 1903 she played in *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* at the Camden theatre, and also took the dual rôle of Helen Standish and Nellie in *Shadows of a Great City*.

Meanwhile, Frank Lister had added a number of parts to his already extensive repertory. Those on which he looked back with the greatest satisfaction were Conn in *The Shaughbrann*, Cyrus Blenkarn in *The Middleman*, Bob Brierley in *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* and Job Armoyd in *Lost in London*.

At last, in January 1906 at the Scala, he hit the limelight in that popular play *A Royal Divorce*. Not since Gomersal had there been an actor so "prodigiously like" the Emperor Napoleon. The critics were unanimous in their praise. In a long article on the play, *The Stage* declared:

"The long line of Napoleons . . . is now continued by that excellent actor of melodrama, Mr. Frank Lister. In the present instance Mr. Lister is admirably made up, adopts with ease the accepted Napoleonic attitudes, with arms folded across chest or hands behind back, and also has the quick, jerky steps and brusque, staccato utterance one expects of a stage Napoleon. He delivers clearly, and with judiciously restrained force, the popularly telling lines about the English bulldogs, put by Wills into the falling Buonaparte's mouth: the scenes with Josephine are played as gently as that with the traitor De Beaumont on the eve of Waterloo is given emphatically, and the famous white charger is bestriden effectively in the first of the two celebrated Waterloo tableaux, with such admirable settings by Mr. Charles Pell."

And *The Era* echoed:

"Mr. Frank Lister deserves our gratitude for not caricaturing Napoleon, and for the realistic moderation of his method. Mr. Lister gives what is quite imaginably a reproduction of the actual man. It is a most artistic and well-considered reading."

Unlike Charles Dillon, Lister, having once "made the grade" in the West End, was able to stay there. He played at the Globe, the Princess's, the Apollo and the Avenue, before settling down for several years at the Lyceum.

Frank Lister had become identified with Napoleon: at each revival of *A Royal Divorce* his services were called upon, and every time he met with the same success. Other parts played by him were the Chorus in *The Yellow Jacket* at the Duke of York's (1913); Private Mason in *Tommy Atkins* and Colonel Graham in *The Soldier's Wedding*, both at the Lyceum in 1914.

In the latter year his fifteen-year-old son Francis made his first appearance in *The Flag Lieutenant* at the Haymarket, while still a pupil at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. After a further two years' training, he made his real début on March 11, 1916, as Lieutenant Delmann in *Kultur at Home*, at the Court Theatre. In July of the same year father and son played together for the first

and only time, in *Lord and Lady Algy*, at the Finsbury Park Empire—Frank Lister as Brabazon Tudway and Francis as Lieutenant Standige. In the following summer, soon after his forty-ninth birthday, Frank Lister died.

At the beginning of 1917, Francis, still under eighteen, was playing Harry Marsland in *The Private Secretary* at the Apollo, with a boyish charm that the critics noted as “full of promise.” Then, as soon as he was old enough, he joined the Royal Artillery for the rest of the war.

Demobilised in 1919, he went on tour with Louis Calvert in a play called *Bo’sun Bill*, and by June 1920 he was at Wyndham’s theatre, as juvenile lead in a comedy with the embarrassing title of *Daddalums*. It was, however, quite good of its kind, and ran for three months. Francis, as the pampered son of a self-made man, had a part that was difficult to make sympathetic or credible, but he attracted favourable notice from the critics Louis Anspacher and W. T. Grein.

From the beginning his work had a smooth polish which most young men take years to attain. And he was very good-looking. With his mother’s white skin and soft brown hair he had inherited the black eyes of the Conquests and the tall elegance of the Farrell men. Something, too, of his Yorkshire father showed in a width of cheekbone and breadth of shoulder that saved him from effeminacy.

His next venture was as Valentine in *You Never Can Tell*, given in a series of nine matinées at the Garrick in November 1920. The *Daily Telegraph* praised him for:

“... making every point with a lightness of touch and an airy grace which demonstrated the wisdom of an excellent piece of casting.”

The part which established Francis Lister as something beyond the herd of personable stage beginners was his Ferdinand in Viola Tree’s production of *The Tempest* at the Aldwych in February 1921. Of this, two such connoisseurs as Ivor Brown and James Agate used the adjective “exquisite.” Sydney Carroll, in the *Sunday Times*, waxed lyrical:

“Mr. Lister’s Ferdinand made me realise the enchantment, the magic of his scenes. His performance was exotic, effeminate, but full of idealism—fraught with fancy and fervid with true feeling.”

The young man himself generously admitted that much of the beauty of his performance was due to Louis Calvert, who, besides playing Caliban, had assisted Miss Tree in the production.

From this point, Francis Lister's career may be summarised under four headings, according to the type of part entrusted to him: from 1921 until his marriage in 1924, the "nice boy"; 1925 till his return from Australia at the end of 1928, the "star-crossed lover"; 1929 till his departure for America in 1934, the "gentleman adventurer"; then, after a long interval representing his work on Broadway and in Hollywood, and four years sacrificed to the second war, he returned to the London stage in 1942 as one of our finest character actors.

From the first period, three or four rôles are worth mentioning. About his Egerton Chilton in an indifferent play called *A Matter of Fact*, *Punch* made a comment deftly anticipating that quality of restrained pathos which is a hallmark of his mature work:

"The most interesting performance seemed to me to be that of Mr. Francis Lister as the young lover. His quiet method gave a sense of reserve strength and of an appreciation on his part that deep sorrow is neither noisy nor gesticulative."

Philip Marvin, in *The Broken Wing*, roused the enthusiasm of St. John Ervine and James Agate. The former commented:

"There remains the part of Philip Marvin, the pilot injured in the crash and suffering from loss of memory. Mr. Francis Lister did not know how to play it melodramatically, so he played it realistically, and once again showed himself one of the very best of our younger actors;"

while Agate was stirred into fine writing:

"When Mr. Francis Lister, the aviator whose plane had crashed, came upon this stageful of exuberant Mexicans, it was as though a noisy supper-band had fallen back, out of sheer exhaustion, upon some web of dreams. . . . Mr. Lister's Ferdinand filled the eye; in this present boisterousness he filled the mind with implications of a rarer world."

*Hawley's of the High Street* gave Francis an opportunity in the light comedy part of Viscount Roxton; while in a short-lived play called *A Perfect Fit* he obtained enthusiastic notice. A remark by *The Era* we again find foreshadowed the actor of to-day.

"One of the most charming things in the play is a little scene with the girl in the last act. Bassett is signing some letters, and he



Ferdinand (1921)

Macduff (1942)



*Photo: John Vickers*

Francis Lister's outstanding Shakesperian Roles

*The Way to the Stars*  
(1932)



*Photo John Vickers*

*Fighters Calling*  
(1944)



*Photo Houston Co*

*The Ivory Tower*  
(1950)

Francis Lister: Three Studio Photographs

looks up nervously and smiles; nothing is said and the whole thing is momentary, but so much is expressed."

This period culminated in a first-rate detective play called *In the Next Room*, which ran for over 200 performances at St. Martin's, in the summer of 1924. Here, as the American journalist Jimmy Godfrey—whom he wisely represented without attempting an accent—he won high praise. *The Era* in particular said:

"Mr. Lister makes his points so easily and gracefully, and his repose on the stage is a perpetual delight."

Next year a triangle play called *Tarnish* was staged at the Vaudeville—with Nora Swinburne as the "good" woman, Olga Lindo as the "bad" one, and Francis Lister as the man between them. It was a mediocre play, but they kept it alive for nearly two months. "If acting could have turned a *feuilleton* into *belles lettres*," said Agate, "these three would have done it." Francis attracted notice by his force in one main scene, reproaching his ex-mistress for betraying him to his fiancée. Here was a hint of Frank Lister's vigour, showing through the suavity of his son.

After this play Margaret Bannerman selected Francis to play opposite her at the Globe. It must have seemed a great opportunity, but in retrospect the months he spent at this theatre were wasted. The plays, not really enough, were chosen for the actress, and the leading man was merely a dark foil for her dazzling platinum beauty. Nor was he luckier in his next play, *Aloma*, at the Adelphi in May 1926. This South Sea Island drama provided him with a rôle in which any good-looking young man could have become the gallery girls' idol. In fact he did—but that was all.

"'Poor Francis Lister!' commented *Theatre World*, 'Our sympathies go out to this clever actor, who seems doomed to a long series of indifferent, almost impossible parts. As Bob Holden, the drunken Englishman who "reforms" with such praiseworthy celerity (thanks, of course, to the golden-hearted, golden-skinned Aloma) he does all that is possible in a rôle that is almost farcical in its ineptitude.'"

The same year came a real chance. Francis was cast to partner Madge Treadwell in Noel Coward's Ruritanian romance *The Queen of Sheba's ParLOUR*. As Sabien Pascal, the commoner loved by the Queen, he covered the gamut of emotion, from the gay persiflage

of the first act, through the dumb misery of renunciation when Nadya was unexpectedly called to her throne, to his exaltation when she offered him one night of love with death at the end.

• The sensation was tremendous. Madge Titheradge gave a memorable performance and Francis rose to her level, with the exhilaration of an ambitious young actor playing opposite a mature actress at the height of her power. But his triumph was clouded by a personal grief, for the play had been running less than a month when his mother died.

Amilie Farrell outlived her husband and her two elder daughters (for Amy too had died in early middle life), reaching the ripe age of ninety. A great character was "Auntie Ammy." Scorning the services of a companion, she lived alone at Hove, bustled about the house and did her own shopping. Much of her affection was lavished on a Yorkshire terrier, which in moments of excitement she would clasp to her bosom. As she still wore the heavily-beaded dresses that had been fashionable in her youth, this used to lead to a great entanglement of bugles in the coat of her pet, who would have to be forcibly plucked away, amid yelps from the victim and little staccato cries of exasperation from his mistress.

By the birth of Francis Lister's son—the third Francis in line—in the summer of 1927, Amilie became a great-grandmother. One January morning, in the bitterly cold winter of 1929, her daily woman found her still in bed. She said she did not feel inclined to get up. Doctor? Nonsense! There was nothing the matter—she only felt tired. Two days later she died. At the inquest it was established that she had, in fact, nothing the matter with her beyond old age—it was just a case of worn-out mechanism quietly running down.

Francis Lister had at this time returned from a year's tour with Margaret Bannerman's company in Australia, where he had played in *Our Betters*, *Other Men's Wives* and *Sexes and Sevens*. He came back to a series of three plays at the Haymarket—a revival of *Quality Street*, a graceful little fantasy by A. A. Milne called *The Ivory Door*, and the ever-popular *Mary Rose*. In all three his leading lady was Angela Baddeley.

The dual rôle of Simon and Harry Blake in the last-named play was hailed by the critics as good work. As *The Era* remarked:

"The difficult part of the play falls to Mr. Francis Lister, who has to give several characterisations in one evening. He acquitted himself excellently in all of them, and even presented the middle-aged Simon creditably. Extreme youth and extreme old age are easy enough for an actor; but satisfactorily to appear as a slangy Australian soldier of 30 or so, a bright youth of 20, a husband of 24, and then as a man of 50 might be the test for the proposed diploma for the stage!"

A memorable moment was his frantic cry of "Mary Rose!" when his young wife vanished, at the end of the island scene.

From 1920 onwards Lister had combined film work with the stage. His first talking film was in 1929—a shipwreck drama called *Atlantic* in which Franklin Dyll gave an outstanding performance as a crippled passenger waiting for death. During 1929 and 1930 he appeared in several light comedies, in suave, philandering, man-of-the-world parts: John Ashley in *Bachelor Father*, which starred Miriam Hopkins; Townley Town in *Let Us Be Gay*, with those admirable American actresses Helen Haye and Tallulah Bankhead in the cast. During a visit to America in 1930 he played opposite Katharine Cornell in *Dishonored Lady*.

Returning to England in 1931, Francis Lister had two engagements at the Whitehall theatre, both with Marion Lorne as the leading lady: a thriller, *Good Losers* (in which he personated a down-and-out ex-officer "with faultlessly fitting clothes and attractive manners"), and a racing comedy called *Take a Chance*. Not until the end of the year, however, did he find a real acting part. Then, in *The Nelson Touch* (St. Martin's, December 16, 1931), he once more set the critics talking.

The play was one of those light-hearted essays in politics which nowadays achieve celebrity by being banned from television. It deals with the masterly handling of a crisis by Richard Fayre, the scapegrace younger brother of the Secretary of State for the Middle East (played by Felix Aylmer), who arrives back from some Lawrence-of-Arabia-like adventures, impersonates his brother to a deputation of Sheiks; and thereby (we are asked to believe) averts a war.

Francis played the part with ease and grace. "A suggestion of farcical treatment would have sent the play headlong to disaster," wrote *Theatre World*, "but Mr. Lister avoids the pitfalls with consummate skill." Oddly enough, the one note of dissent, amid a chorus of praise, came from James Agate who, "like a minute-gun at sea" (to quote his own statement a few years previously), had

been declaring Lister the best *jeune premier* in England "with a monotonous persistence." On this occasion Agate sounded a warning note:

• "Now for Mr. Lister, who plays the part of the impostor with all his wonted and familiar charm. I am afraid I think there should be more in the part than this. Watching the young man dictating the Government's terms one feels that if he were actually the Minister of State his performance would not differ by a hair's breadth. But surely the boy should seem to us to be other than he seems to Abdullah, for he must perforce be getting a horrific medley of *panache*, plus fun plus funk out of it? Therefore behind what Abdullah takes to be a marble front we should see a quaking jelly. Mr. Alfred Lunt is the actor for this kind of thing, and I cite him with diffidence, first because he is in America, and second because he is a genius. Let us be thankful, therefore, for Mr. Francis Lister, who is here and has grace and talent."

There seemed, in fact, some risk that Francis would become typed as a sleek dress-suit actor. But in *Richard of Bordeaux*, as Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford, he gave a performance that was hailed as his best since his exquisite Ferdinand in *The Tempest*. The play was the sensation of 1933, and no one who saw it has forgotten it. It owed much to the lovely settings and costumes by Motley: Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies like a drooping lily in her white wimple; the young John Gielgud flashing in white and gold, and as his foil the dark Robert de Vere in moonlight blue—De Vere playing nonchalantly at cup-and-ball, scribbling his verse, with a fine insolence, during a Council meeting. The highlight of the play was a scene between the three of them, when the dandy Oxford, mud-spattered and exhausted, appeared before Richard in the Tower to explain why he had escaped from a lost battle. Spurned by the King, his boyhood comrade, he was comforted by the sympathy of the gracious Lady Anne. Night after night the scene was played with a bitter, wistful beauty that left the house in tears.

That Francis Lister is no merely intuitive actor but has inherited plenty of Conquest sense in theatre matters, is proved by an interview which he gave at this time, full of excellent advice to actors and producers:

"I believe that an actor should change about frequently from modern to costume work," he said. "One acts as a corrective of the faults and mannerisms of the other. Acting in a costume play gets you out of the silly habit of fiddling about with cigarettes and putting your hands in your pockets. Again, playing in a lounge

suit has a moderating effect on the flamboyant tricks of costume acting.

"Costume, of course, is an enormous advantage. It helps a great deal in the creation of a part. You have to walk in the correct style, move your hands in the proper manner. Costume gives you confidence. But I feel that costume plays are extremely difficult to rehearse. In *Richard of Bordeaux* I play the part of an exquisite, and I used to feel slightly ridiculous at rehearsals, posturing about in a suit of "plus fours." Once you've got the proper clothes on, however, it is a different thing. For this reason I believe a costume play should have several dress rehearsals.'"<sup>1</sup>

Circumstances made Robert de Vere the swan-song of Francis Lister's youth, so far as the English theatre was concerned. He continued his part in the Broadway version of the play, and between 1934 and the outbreak of the second World War, made only fleeting visits to this country. The interval is filled by various stage appearances and several films, including Chauvelin in *The Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel*, the hero's brother-in-law Edmund in *Clive of India*, and Nelson in *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

At the outbreak of war Lister was forty: if he had chosen to stay in New York, earning his living with increased facility in the absence on war service of younger men—as some of the English actors in America did do—no one could have compelled him to return, and few would have thought the worse of him. But he volunteered immediately, rejoined his old regiment, the Gunners, and—rejecting all invitations to organise troop concerts, run E.N.S.A. shows, etc.—served as an ordinary officer until he was invalided out in 1942.

At this time John Gielgud was touring with *Macbeth*. When the actor playing Macduff suddenly lost his voice, Gielgud remembered his old comrade of *Richard of Bordeaux* and sent an emergency call to Lister who, after four years away from the theatre, had just four days to learn the long part. . . . "Heaven only knows what you *said* in the last scene," remarked Leon Quartermaine to him after his first performance, "*but it scanned!*" (Francis, like all the Conquests, enjoys telling an anecdote against himself.)

By the time they opened in London, in July 1942, Lister had "played himself in," and his performance was a spiritual experience to the audience. In the scene where Macduff learns that his wife

<sup>1</sup> From *Theatre World*, March 1933, by courtesy of the Proprietors.

and children have been murdered, he held the house under a hypnotic spell. "Great acting," said the *Spectator*, while Ashley Dukes in *Theatre Arts* wrote of the "grand Macduff." But Lister was unlucky in the moment of his "come-back." The papers were rationed and their columns were full of war-news; there was little chance even for such writers as Agate and Ivor Brown to write the scholarly essays which had built up the reputation of actors in previous decades. The beautiful performance passed without adequate recognition, and Francis was left to regain, by sheer dogged perseverance, the ground lost during his long absence.

His career since then lies within the memory of us all, so one need only mention some of its salient points.

During 1943 he played Randall Utterwood in a brilliant production of *Heartbreak House*, with a cast including Robert Donat, Edith Evans and Isabel Jeans. In 1944 he toured with Ronald Adam's fine play *Fighters Calling* (which, under the inept title *An English Summer*, was produced at Hammersmith several years later, with André Morell in the lead). The fly-bomb scare emptied the London theatres and prevented the play from coming in to Town; but for those of us who saw it on tour, Francis Lister's performance remains a vivid memory. He represented Squadron-Leader Henry Armstrong, a "dug-out" from the 1914 war, in command of a fighter base. As the story unfolded, the audience realised, while the characters remained in the dark, that one pilot for whom he felt a special sympathy was in fact his own son—born of a brief love-affair in the previous war. (He had been taken prisoner, and on his return from Germany had been unable to trace the girl or the child.) A crucial scene showed the father controlling an air attack from the ground, listening-in to the young man's death in his crashing plane. Here Lister put across a wealth of conflicting emotions: acute distress, with the need to conceal it from those around him; the dazed confusion of shock, conflicting with his trained military mind which went on automatically issuing orders. But his acting triumph came in the following scene, where he discovered among the young pilot's effects the photograph of his lost love—now also dead. By an amazing trick of mime he conveyed to the audience that he had recognised the portrait—without a word, and without a gesture that would in real life have disclosed his emotion to those around him. The play closed on a note of resignation, with the Squadron-Leader settling down to a game of chess and saying with a bitter-sweet detachment: "I have lost something today—and I have found something."

After this, and an interlude for playing the Duke of Orleans in Olivier's film of *Henry V*, Francis joined John Gielgud's Haymarket company, playing Horatio in *Hamlet* and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Then again he sacrificed his personal advantage to patriotism by undertaking a long E.N.S.A. tour of Germany with *Julius Caesar*, badly miscast as Cassius.

Tired, unwell and disillusioned, he returned to England, and in the late autumn of 1946 lent his services as guest star to the brave little Torch—the smallest theatre in London. The play, called *The Wisest Fool*, was an ambitious chronicle-history of King James I, overcrowded with lay-figures; but the King himself had been drawn in meticulous detail, and Lister built up a telling characterisation. No one who heard it will forget his hoarse cry of "More—more!" to the executioner torturing Guy Fawkes, or the still pathos of the dying King and his half-incredulous whisper: "Is this . . . Death?" The best tribute to his acting is that at the dress rehearsal the theatre staff, who had heard the play *ad nauseam* for three weeks, were moved to tears, and a projected funeral oration by another actor was discarded by common consent as an anticlimax.

Another piece of work that too few Londoners had the opportunity of seeing was Lister's Nevil Kingsley in Vernon Sylvaine's *Quiet in the Forest*, which was toured by James Lavall and played for a week at "Q," but never reached the West End. Kingsley—doomed, as the Prologue revealed, to die in an air raid—was a dipsomaniac at odds with his wife and suffering the nervous strain of abstinence. A moment of sheer delight to the onlookers was one wordless passage when, inadvertently left alone with a glass of whisky, he prowled around it, turned his back on the temptation, and then with a swift pounce drained the glass and hid it, almost in the same movement. And in Lister's best vein of dedicated resignation were the closing moments when, at last reconciled with his wife, Kingsley drew her towards the stairway—and, as we knew, to their death—with the simple words: "Shall we—go up?"

For a year or two after his return it had seemed that his career was in the balance, that he risked slipping into the rank-and-file of supporting players; but with his Dr. Marshall in *A Sleeping Clergyman* at the Criterion in the spring of 1947 it became evident that the old magic still lingered in his touch. With a skill in make-up recalling his father, he aged in successive scenes from twenty-nine to ninety—and was convincing at each stage.

From this he passed to Wyndham's, to renew his acquaintance with *You Never Can Tell*. This production was memorable for

having two ex-Valentines in the cast with young James Donald, the latest recruit to the part. Harcourt Williams now played the old waiter "William"—and played it exquisitely; Francis Lister, with a heavy character make-up that brought out an unsuspected likeness to his great-uncle George Conquest, was Fergus Crampton. But he was soon withdrawn from the cast to star opposite Gladys Cooper as Henry Aspen in *The Indifferent Shepherd*. The surname of the character tells all that need be known about the man, and Lister played him with a shivering sensitivity that no aspen-leaf could have bettered.

A welcome change to comedy came with the Sacha Guitry part in *Don't Listen, Ladies*, at the St. James's theatre in September 1948. Here was a vintage performance, recalling a twenty-five-year-old prophecy of James Agate:

"I have seldom seen a young actor create the atmosphere of high comedy out of mean material so unobtrusively as Mr. Lister did in this play (*Hawley's of the High Street*), and I venture to commend him to managers as an actor likely to bring to the theatre some of the distinction that was taken from it when Wyndham and Alexander died."

Matching Lister's performance was one by Ada Reeve as Julie Bille-en-Bois, the former Moulin Rouge dancer, which was a pure gem of character acting. It had that quality of humour poised on the brink of tears that is possessed only by comedians of the calibre of Dan Leno and Chaplin—and very rarely by a woman.

There was plenty more to recommend the play to a discriminating public; witty dialogue, a beautiful set, the enchanting dresses and attractive personality of Constance Cummings and Betty Marsden, as the antique-dealer's wives; two lovely cameos by a mature and a young actor respectively; D. A. Mehan as a French aristocrat collecting *objets d'art*—both furniture and feminine; and Denholm Elliott, bringing a limpid candour to the very difficult part of an adolescent shop-assistant platonically in love with his master's wife.

Alas! the arbiters of taste have been forced from the gracious Edwardian drawing-rooms into the drab reformatory of Socialist England, and the type of high comedy drama in which this polished acting shows at its best has only a limited public. *Don't Listen, Ladies* had excellent notices and attracted a fashionable audience, but unfortunately, early in the New Year, Lister had to leave the cast for several weeks owing to pneumonia. He resumed his part for the final fortnight of the run.

His next two plays were unfortunate. *The Non-Resident* ran only five days, and *The Ivory Tower* did not achieve the success it deserved.

The collapse of the latter play was particularly regrettable, for in his part as the doomed Foreign Minister Jan Daubek—a thinly veiled alias of Jan Masaryk—Lister achieved a perfect balance of the sensitivity inherited from his mother with his father's punch and power. Harold Hobson described him as "the finest passive, as opposed to dominating, actor on our stage"; but there was more than passivity as he rose to the climax. The theatre was galvanised when, in the last few moments of the play, the haunted, conscience-ridden man suddenly saw his way clear ahead, turned on his Communist enemy the revolver intended for his own suicide, and then drew himself up to walk over the balcony to his death. Melodrama? Possibly—but played with a restrained force that turned it to tragedy.

Francis Lister, the last Conquest on the boards, somehow never achieved the somewhat showy popularity implicit in the word "star": he was that far rarer product—the connoisseur's actor.

The final page of this chapter is a short and sad one. For years past it had been impossible to talk long with Francis Lister without hearing him say: "I'm very tired." During the spring of 1951 the insidious disease that was sapping his energies declared itself. He was touring, with Jessie Royce Landis as his leading lady, in a pleasant light comedy called *Come, Live with Me*, and as the weeks went by he became increasingly ill. On June 21 the play opened at the Vaudeville. Lister, in the true troupier spirit, called on his doctor to ask: "Can I possibly carry on?" The answer was forthright: "Open, if you must—but get a substitute as soon as you can. Within a week or two you will have to come into hospital." In point of fact, he was only able to play for four days. London's last glimpse of him was in a gracious part which gave full scope for his suavity and charm, as the husband of a vivacious ex-prima-donna who, deserted for twenty years, returns to win her back again. As he smiled and bowed at the end of a successful first night, few in the house can have realised that he was a dying man.

He was taken to Mile End Hospital where the Medical Superintendent, Dr. W. G. Sears, was a personal friend from the Savage Club. Once more the wheel had come full cycle, for the last of the

Conquest actors died only a short walk away from the Whitechapel Pavilion where his great-grandfather Benjamin had started out on his career.

A cool, rainy summer merged imperceptibly into a warm and golden autumn as Lister's life ebbed slowly away. He lay peacefully, suffering very little pain, and for a while it seemed as though his courage and patience had triumphed. By mid-October he was well enough to sit up for several hours and to walk about his room. Then, on the night of October 27 he had a sudden relapse, and in the early hours of the next morning he died. His life had not been a happy one, nor his career as brilliant as his great gifts merited; but those who loved him can take comfort in the thought that his last days, under the care of his good friend, passed in a deep peace:

*And calm of mind, all passion spent.*

## CHAPTER XXII

### *The Conquest Tradition*

WE have now traced the fortunes of the Conquests for four generations, through the Garrick, the Grecian and the Surrey, to the point where not one member of the family is actively engaged in the theatre. And the stimulating question arises: suppose this generation or the next should throw up another Conquest with the same happy blend of all-round talent and financial flair as the great George, would he achieve equivalent results?

It does not seem likely, for conditions have altered a great deal in the past fifty years. Three phrases never heard at the Grecian or the Surrey were: "Closed shop!" "That's not my job!" "The Union won't let me work overtime!" Any lad who was really keen to be on the stage or behind it would be given a chance to show what he was worth—and once accepted, it was taken for granted that he would do whatever he was told.

George Conquest's appellation of "the Governor," given to him half-humorously as a token of affectionate respect, was no empty title: within his little kingdom he was supreme. If it was necessary, in order to get a pantomime ready on time, to work all night, his staff worked all night—without question, and without any feeling that they were being victimised. They knew quite well that "the Guv'nor" would not ask them to do anything that he was not willing or not able to do himself. He was one of those rare men who are entitled to quote, with no fear of having it turned against them, that admirable Italian proverb: *chi non sà fare non sà comandare*—or, approximately, "if you can't do a thing yourself you can't give orders."

In recognition of their loyal service, the Surrey retainers knew that "the Guv'nor" took as personal an interest in their welfare as any feudal overlord. When he died it was found that he had a pensions list of many faithful old servants, stage-hands and dressers, whose allowances ceased, not with his own death but with that of the recipient.

George Conquest's views on outside bodies who tried to interfere

between him and his staff were uncompromising: "The coming of the Trade Unions," he said pithily, "is the beginning of the end in this country." He was equally scornful of lawyers: "Never go to Law," was his advice to his sons. "Always settle out of Court—it's more worth while in the long run."

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of George Conquest was his zest for life; the one thing that infuriated him was to hear people say they were bored. None of the Conquest family ever was bored, and least of all George himself. Even after he gave up acting he was always busy at something. Every morning, at the same hour, he would telephone the theatre for news, and it used to amuse the actors assembled for rehearsal when they saw the stage doorkeeper—still unaccustomed to the newly invented instrument—gingerly take off the receiver and shout into it: "Good-morning, Mr. Conquest!" while with his free hand he ceremoniously raised his hat, as if in the presence of "the Guv'nor."

In his attitude towards education, George was very modern. Unlike most Victorian girls, his daughters were sent to first-rate schools, while his sons, like himself, had the benefit of a Continental training. He realised too that the real purpose of education was not to fill a child with book-learning, but to stimulate his brain with a healthy curiosity, so that he would go on widening his interests and adding to his knowledge after school days.

There was something in George's philosophy of life and standard of values that suggests the best days of Athens. He neither hoarded money, despised it, nor squandered it, but spent it to the best advantage, to provide harmonious surroundings for himself and his family. Towards his employees his attitude was patriarchal: fair treatment as a reward for good service. In face of interference from outside he had a truly Greek spirit of sturdy independence. At the end of his useful life he could well have said with Stevenson:

"I have been happy—happy now I go!"

It may well be asked—if the Surrey had any intrinsic value to the community, why did it become obsolete almost as soon as George Conquest died? The answer is partly in the restrictions about which the younger George complained so bitterly: the fire-precautions, insistence on gangways, and abolition of standing-room, that made the theatre uneconomic (and to which entertainment tax and profits tax have now been added); partly in the changing lives of the people. In the old days the play was a necessary distraction: today,

with increased facilities for sport and travel, with cinema, radio and television as counter-attractions, it takes up less place as an amusement.

The nearest approach to the self-contained theatre and drama school is the present Old Vic; but now it takes a committee of Directors, backed by a grant from the Arts Council, to do what George Conquest achieved single-handed.

Did the nineteenth-century public get better value for its money than we do today? Looking at the Grecian programmes, we cannot help feeling that they did—certainly in quantity, if not in quality, even allowing for the difference in the real value of money. For a shilling anyone could stay on the Grecian premises from seven-thirty till past midnight. The main theatre offered him two melodramas with a ballet or farce in between: if any item on the programme did not appeal to him, he could slip into the music-hall for an hour or walk about the grounds, sampling the amusements provided; and after the theatre closed there was still a concert in the gardens, to which he could listen with a beer-mug in his hand and a cigar between his lips. The Surrey entertainments were less comprehensive, but for 4*d.* (the price of a gallery seat) the visitor could enjoy a curtain-raiser farce and a melodrama lasting for several hours.

It seems hard that of all this enjoyment and achievement scarcely a vestige should remain. New buildings have swept the Garrick and the Grecian from the map of London, like a picture wiped from a blackboard and redrawn: the ruins of the Surrey are as desolate as any air-raid site. Of the "golden lads and girls" who peopled its boards fifty years ago, all but a very few are in their graves. Have they left nothing to us of abiding value?

The man who found the answer to that question was Sir Henry Irving, and the noble words that he chose for his own epitaph may well serve to justify all who have adopted this most evanescent of vocations:

"Marble crumbles, the very names of cities are forgotten, but if one human heart is touched, if joy has come where sorrow was, the actor has not lived in vain."



# APPENDICES



# CHART PEDIGREE I

George Augustus Oliver, = Sarah  
tailor and draper, of  
6 Duke Street, Smithfield

(i)  
Clarissa = Benjamin Oliver = Jane Elizabeth  
Ann Conquest, 1804-  
Bennett, 1872  
Allen; m. 1870

Isabella = Henry Broomhead  
1845-1887 m. 1865

Laura = Henry T.  
b. 1842 Dyson

George Augustus = Elizabeth  
Oliver Conquest, Osmond,  
1837-1901 1838-1890

Benjamin  
Oliver;  
b. 1831;  
d. young

Charles James = Clarissa Ann  
Church Dillon, (Clara)  
1819-1881 1824-1888

Amilie, = Henry Farrell, (See Chart II)  
1838-1929 m. 1864

Henry George = Clara,  
(Ratcliffe) 1845-1898

Henry Oliver  
Broomhead;  
b. 1866

Isabella Laura  
(Issy Behring),  
b. 1870

Herbert = Laura,  
Leonard d. 1950  
Amy,  
living 1951

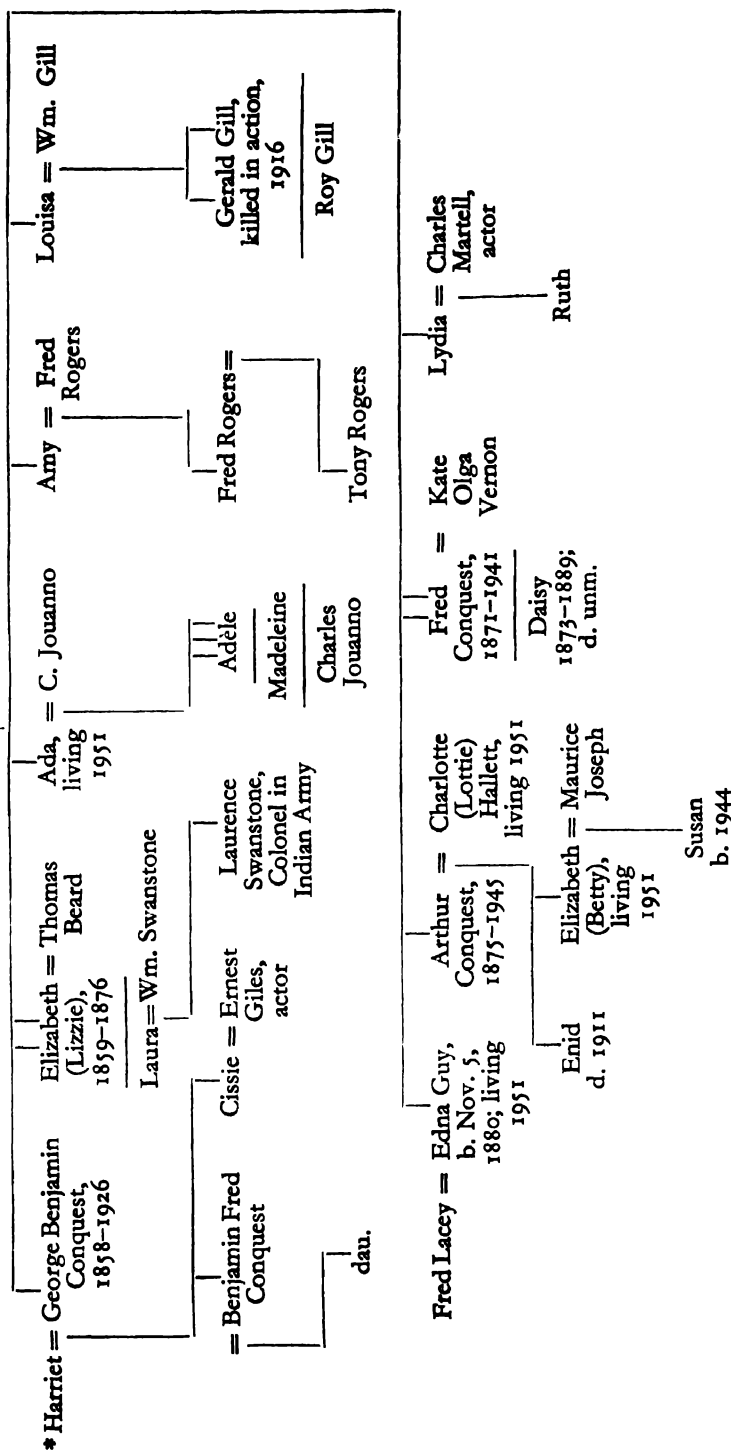
Arthur Farrell  
Francis Farrell  
Amy = — Shuster  
Laura, living 1951  
= — Rimington

Francis Horace = Clara  
(Frank) Lister, (Cissy),  
1868-1917 d. 1926

(i)  
Nora Swinburne = Francis = Margot Grahame  
(mar. dis.) Lister, (mar. dis.)  
1899-1951

Francis S. Lister  
b. 1927

George Augustus = Elizabeth  
Oliver Conquest, Osmond,  
1837-1901 1838-1890  
(See Chart I)



\* A cousin; daughter of Elizabeth Osmond's sister.

## Conquest Pantomimes

GARRICK. It has not been possible to compile a list, but we have found references to the following:

- 1831 *The Fairy of the Feathered Tribe.*
- 1837 *Hicory Diccory Dock.*
- 1839 *The Singing Trees and the Golden Waters.*

### GRECIAN

- 1851 *Queen Mab.* By C. A. Somerset.
- 1852 *The Fairy and the Fawn.*
- 1853 *Harlequin Charity Brat.*
- 1854 *Harlequin Red Riding Hood.*
- 1855 *Harlequin Sun and Moon.* By Charles Rice.
- 1856 *Harlequin Crib, King of Clubs.*
- 1857 *Peter Wilkins and the Flying Indians.*
- 1858 *Harlequin Guy Faux.* By G. Conquest and H. Spry. (*All subsequent pantomimes by these two authors.*)
- 1859 *Harlequin Valentine and Orson.*
- 1860 *The Blue Bird of Paradise.*
- 1861 *The Fair One with the Golden Locks.*
- 1862 *The Spider and the Fly.*
- 1863 *Harlequin Robinson Crusoe.*
- 1864 *Punch and Judy.*
- 1865 *The Bottle Imp.*
- 1866 *The Devil on Two Sticks.*
- 1867 *Harlequin Rik-Rak.*
- 1868 *The Flying Dutchman.*
- 1869 *The Gnome Fly.*
- 1870 *Herne the Hunter.*
- 1871 *Zig-Zag the Crooked.*
- 1872 *Nix, the Demon Dwarf.*
- 1873 *The Wood Demon.*
- 1874 *Snip, Snap, Snorum.*
- 1875 *Spitz-Spitze, the Spider Crab.*
- 1876 *Grim Goblin.*
- 1877 *Roley-Poley.*
- 1878 *Hokee-Pokee.*
- 1879 *Harlequin Rokoko, the Rock Fiend.*

## APPENDICES

### SURREY

- 1881 *Mother Bunch.*
- 1882 *Puss in Boots.*
- 1883 *Jack and Jill.*
- 1884 *Aladdin.*
- 1885 *Robinson Crusoe.*
- 1886 *Jack and the Beanstalk.*
- 1887 *Sindbad.*
- 1888 *The Forty Thieves.*
- 1889 *Dick Whittington.*
- 1890 *The Sleeping Beauty.*
- 1891 *The Fair One with the Golden Locks.*
- 1892 *Puss in Boots.*
- 1893 *Cinderella.*
- 1894 *Red Riding Hood.*
- 1895 *Aladdin.*
- 1896 *Sinbad the Sailor.*
- 1897 *The Yellow Dwarf.*
- 1898 *Jack and Jill.*
- 1899 *Goody Two Shoes.*
- 1900 *Miss Muffit.*  
(Death of George Conquest, May 1901.)
- 1901 *Aladdin.*
- 1902 *Cinderella.*
- 1903 *The Forty Thieves.*  
(The Conquests left the Surrey, July 1904.)

## *Plays Produced at the Grecian (1851 onwards)*

*Note:* This list has been compiled from several sources: Allardyce Nicoll's "Later 19th Century Drama," Era Almanack list of "New Plays of the Year," with Playbills in the Enthoven Collection and the Shoreditch and Finsbury Public Libraries. It does not claim to be complete. (Pantomimes listed separately.)

### 1851

- March 31 *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*  
*The Young Widow.* (Farce.)  
*Flora and Zephyr.* (Ballet.)
- April — *Pa and Ma.* (Farce.)
- „ 21 *Nobody in Town, or The Age of Wonders.*
- June 2 *Memoirs of the Devil.*
- Aug. 25 *Jason and Medea.* (Burlesque.) By J. P. Wooler.
- Oct. 6 *Quack, Quack, Quack, or Modern Practice.* (Farce.)
- „ 13 *The Bloomers.* By C. A. Somerset.
- „ 20 *Aline, or The Daughter of Fire.*
- Nov. 10 *Black and White.* (Entertainment.)
- „ 24 *Poison in Jest.*

### 1852

- Feb. 2 *The Morning of Life.*
- March 15 *Good Night, Signor Pantalon.* By C. A. Somerset.
- „ 18 *The Corsican Brothers.*
- April 26 *Noëmie.* By W. E. Suter.
- May 13 *Cinderella.*
- „ 31 *Eulalie and Vermilion.* (Burlesque.) By J. P. Wooler.
- July 5 *Venus with a Tippet on.* By C. A. Somerset.
- Oct. 25 *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* By Edward Fitzball.
- Dec. 16 *Alice May.* By Edward Fitzball.
- „ 27 *The Queen of Spades.*

### 1853

- March 28 *Eola.* By Charles Rice.
- „ 28 *Enchanted Wives.* (Farce.) By Charles Rice.
- May 16 *Conquest of the Eagle.* By Charles Sloman.
- „ 25 *Marinette, or The Brigand's Daughter.*
- May 30 *Marcorette.*
- June 13 *The Royal Menagerie.* (Farce.) By E. L. Blanchard.

# · APPENDICES

June	13	<i>The Electric Telegraph.</i> (Farce.) By C. A. Somerset.
July	2	<i>Three Cheers for Charity, or A Night's Wonders.</i>
„	13	<i>Spirit Rapping and Table Moving.</i> (Farce.)
„	18	<i>The Bride of Albi.</i>
Aug.	22	<i>The Chevalier de St. George.</i> By C. A. Somerset.
Sept.	15	<i>The Ladies of the Convent.</i> By W. E. Suter.
Oct.	1	<i>Quatre Bras.</i> By C. Rice.
„	17	<i>A Woman's Secret, or Richelieu's Wager.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	24	<i>A Husband on Trial.</i> (Farce.) By W. E. Suter.
Nov.	11	<i>Violette la Grande, or The Life of an Actress.</i> By W. E. Suter.

## 1854

Jan.	31	<i>The Plague of the Family.</i> By W. E. Suter.
Feb.	12	<i>The Ladies of the Convent.</i>
„	12	<i>A Woman's Secret.</i>
„	12	<i>The Nymphs of the Lake.</i> (Ballet.)
„	12	<i>Old Joe and Young Joe.</i>
March	18	<i>My Wife's First Husband.</i>
April	10	<i>Virginus.</i> By Sheridan Knowles.
„	10	<i>The Three Musketeers.</i>
„	10	<i>The Naiad of the Stream.</i> (Ballet.)
„	10	<i>Villikins and his Dinah.</i>
„	18	<i>A Winter in London, or A Devilish Good Fellow.</i>
„	18	<i>Love's Victory.</i>
„	18	<i>The Slave.</i>
„	18	<i>Boots at the Swan.</i>
„	23	<i>Olympic Revels.</i>
„	25	<i>The Beard and Moustache Movement.</i> (Farce.)
May	1	<i>The Lady of Lyons.</i>
„	2	<i>Rich and Poor, or the Uphill Game of Life.</i>
June	21	<i>The Marriage of Price, or The Marquis and the Cobbler.</i> By W. E. Suter.
Aug.	20	<i>Faust.</i>
„	20	<i>Grand Turkish Ballet.</i>
Sept.	12	<i>The Princess of the Burning Eyes.</i>
Oct.	29	<i>The School for Scandal.</i>
„	29	<i>The Hypocrite.</i>
Nov.	6	<i>The Stranger.</i>
„	6	<i>The Honeymoon.</i>
„	13	<i>The Poor Gentleman.</i>
„	18	<i>The Union of Nations.</i> (Ballet.)

## 1855

Jan.	1	<i>The Day of Reckoning.</i>
Feb.	5	<i>The Green Riders.</i>
„	19	<i>The Soldier's Privilege.</i>

PLAYS AT THE GRECIAN (1851 ONWARDS)

Feb.	19	<i>Old Joe and Young Joe.</i>
„	26	<i>The Bride of Bow.</i> By J. Bosworth.
„	26	<i>The Soldier's Bride.</i>
March	14	<i>Seven Poor Travellers.</i>
„	24	<i>Past Midnight.</i>
April	9	<i>Geneviève.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	9	<i>Othello.</i>
„	9	<i>The Miller and His Men.</i>
„	16	<i>Azrael.</i> By Edward Fitzball.
„	16	<i>Electra.</i> (Ballet.)
June	25	<i>The Vow of Secrecy.</i>
„	25	<i>The Seven Capital Sins.</i>
July	13	<i>Change for a Sovereign.</i>
„	26	<i>Broken Faith.</i>
Aug.	13	<i>Jack Sheppard.</i>
„	16	<i>Puzzled and Pleased.</i> (Farce.) By W. E. Suter.
Sept.	—	<i>Oliver Twist.</i>
Oct.	1	<i>Three Words, or Silent not Dumb.</i>
„	1	<i>Perpetual Motion.</i> (Ballet.)
„	1	<i>Polichinelle.</i> (Farce.)
„	1	<i>Geneviève.</i> By G. Conquest.
Oct.	8	<i>Marie.</i>
„	15	<i>The Retaliation.</i>
„	22	<i>The Usurer's Daughter.</i>
„	29	<i>Marriage by Force.</i>
„	27	<i>The Golden Branch.</i> (Fairy Burlesque.)
Nov.	5	<i>Who's Your Hatter?</i> (Farce.)
„	12	<i>The Momentous Question.</i>
„	19	<i>The Foster Sisters.</i>
„	19	<i>Love's Victory.</i>
„	26	<i>A Day of Reckoning.</i>
„	26	<i>Broken Faith.</i>
Dec.	3	<i>Giralda.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	10	<i>Vanity.</i> By —. Courtney.
„	10	<i>The Foster-Sisters.</i>
„	10	<i>Amilie.</i>

1856

Jan.	25	<i>Oak Leaves and Emeralds, or The Titled Grisette.</i>
Feb.	11	<i>The Jealous Wife.</i>
„	14	<i>Pigeons and Hawks.</i>
„	16	<i>Susan Hopley.</i>
„	16	<i>The Lady of Lyons.</i>
„	25	<i>Money.</i> By Bulwer Lytton.
April	21	<i>Pizarro.</i> By R. B. Sheridan.
„	21	<i>Rob Roy Macgregor.</i>

# APPENDICES

April	21	<i>Black Ey'd Susan.</i>
?	?	<i>A Woman's Secret.</i> By G. Conquest.
		<i>Amilie.</i>
		<i>Robert Macaire.</i>
		<i>Holly Tree Inn.</i>
		<i>Hamlet.</i>
June	6	<i>A Snake in the Grass.</i>
„	11	<i>Going to see the Fireworks.</i>
Sept.	15	<i>Much Ado about Nothing.</i>
„	15	<i>How to get a Wife.</i>
„	15	<i>The Hypocrite.</i>
„	15	<i>The Corsair.</i> (Ballet.)
„	15	<i>Marie Jeanne.</i>
Oct.	15	<i>A Cabinet Secret.</i> (Farce.)
Nov.	1	<i>Betsy's Found.</i> (Farce.)
Dec.	14	<i>Henri the Witless.</i>

1857

March	1	<i>The Wreck of the Golden Mary.</i>
„	2	<i>The Harp of Altenburg.</i>
„	2	<i>Fi-Fi.</i> By W. Moncrieff.
„	2	<i>The Rent Day.</i> By Douglas Jerrold.
„	8	<i>Much Ado about Nothing.</i>
„	8	<i>Crinoline.</i> (Farce.)
„	8	<i>Black-Ey'd Susan.</i>
„	9	<i>John Dobbs.</i>
„	30	<i>Clari, the Maid of Milan.</i>
April	13	<i>The Wrong Baby.</i> (Farce.)
„	15	<i>The Way of the World.</i> <sup>1</sup>
„	15	<i>The Forty Thieves.</i> (Burlesque.)
„	27	<i>The Iron Chest.</i>
May	11	<i>Geneviève.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	11	<i>The Corsair.</i>
„	28	<i>Macbeth.</i> (Burlesque.)
June	15	<i>A Frightful Murder in Hoxton.</i> (Farce.)
„	29	<i>The Momentous Question.</i> By Edward Fitzball
July	6	<i>The Fall of Calais.</i>
Oct.	30	<i>My Wife and my Umbrella.</i> (Farce.)
Nov.	9	<i>The Prisoner of War.</i>
„	9	<i>The Wedding Gown.</i>

1858

March	27	<i>Where's Mr. Smith?</i> (Farce.)
May	24	<i>Love and Crime, or The Fatal Passion.</i>
June	14	<i>It's Never Too Late to Mend.</i>

(1) Not Congreve's play: a Haymarket piece, "Double-Faced People," remade by George Conquest.

# PLAYS AT THE GRECIAN (1851 ONWARDS)

Aug.	7	<i>Briarly Farm.</i>
„	9	<i>The School for Scandal.</i>
Oct.	1	<i>The Heart's Victory.</i>
„	1	<i>Nathalie.</i>
„	4	<i>The Physician's Wife.</i>
„	12	<i>A Woman's Heart.</i>
„	14	<i>A Life's Revenge.</i> By W. E. Suter.
Nov.	8	<i>The Fugitives.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	12	<i>The Story of a Night.</i> By T. Mead.

1859

Jan.	1	<i>The Story of a Night.</i>
„	24	<i>Catherine Howard, or Woman's Ambition.</i> By W. Suter. <sup>1</sup>
March	7	<i>It's Never too Late to Mend.</i>
„	7	<i>Vanity.</i> By J. Courtney.
„	14	<i>The Broken Chain.</i> By E. [sic] Suter.
„	14	<i>George Vernet.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	14	<i>Murder in Hoxton.</i>
April	4	<i>Love and Crime.</i>
„	4	<i>Infidelity.</i>
„	25	<i>Ruthven.</i> By A. Harris.
May	9	<i>The Cloud of Life, or The Blind Men of the Pyrenees.</i> By T. Mead
„	30	<i>The Felon's Bond.</i>
June	13	<i>Mervyn Clitheroe.</i> By T. Mead.
„	13	<i>The Muleteer of Toledo.</i>
„	13	<i>Give me my Wife.</i> (Farce.) By W. E. Suter.
July	4	<i>Rich in Love but Poor in Pocket.</i> (Farce.)
„	10	<i>The Masked Mother.</i>
„	18	<i>Married Bachelors.</i> (Farce.)
Aug.	1	<i>Never Reckon your Chickens before they are Hatched.</i> (Farce.)
„	8	<i>Noëmie.</i> By W. E. Suter.
„	15	<i>The Buccaneer's Wife.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	25	<i>A Felon's Bond.</i> By W. E. Suter.
Sept.	26	<i>The Angel of Darkness.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	26	<i>Whitefriars.</i>
Oct.	3	<i>The Eight Pages.</i> (Farce.)
„	14	<i>Rookwood.</i>
„	27	<i>The Vagrant and his Family.</i>
Nov.	7	<i>Agnolo Dora.</i>
„	20	<i>Belphegor.</i>
„	21	<i>The Tower of Nesle.</i>

1860

Feb.	9	<i>Temptation and Atonement.</i>
March	1	<i>The Old House at Home.</i>

(1) Attributed also to George Conquest.

## APPENDICES

March	5	<i>The Accusing Spirit.</i>
"	22	<i>The Six Degrees of Crime.</i>
"	5	<i>The Spirit of Revenge.</i>
April	9	<i>The Garret Angel.</i>
"	30	<i>Royalist and Republican.</i>
May	28	<i>The House in the Valley.</i> By G. Conquest.
July	9	<i>The Will and the Word.</i>
"	12	<i>Marco Sciarra.</i>
"	12	<i>Bamboozle.</i> (Farce.)
Aug.	6	<i>The Reprieve.</i>
"	15	<i>The Ostler's Vision.</i>
"	22	<i>The Voice of Honour.</i>
"	27	<i>Cagliostro.</i>
"	28	<i>The Wife's First Lesson.</i> (Farce.)
"	29	<i>The Tempter and the Disowned.</i>
Sept.	2	<i>It's Never Too Late to Mend.</i>
"	3	<i>Injured Innocence.</i> (Farce.)
"	5	<i>Hymen's Muster Roll.</i>
"	6	<i>The Pirate's Love, or Ocean Birds of May.</i> By G. Conquest.
"	20	<i>The Life and Death of Jack Sheppard.</i>
Oct.	16	<i>The Taint in the Blood, or The Poisoned Pearl.</i>
"	29	<i>The Three Brothers of the Old Château.</i>
Nov.	26	<i>Destiny, or The Traitor's Doom.</i> By G. Conquest.

1861

Jan.	7	<i>Ruy Blas.</i>
"	23	<i>The Italian Bravo.</i>
March	6	<i>The Gipsy King.</i>
"	14	<i>A Dream of Life.</i>
April	1	<i>Forget and Forgive.</i>
"	22	<i>Highways and Byways of Life.</i>
"	25	<i>Daredevil Dick.</i>
May	20	<i>The Angel of Midnight.</i> By W. E. Suter.
June	6	<i>The String of Pearls.</i>
"	10	<i>The Heart's Victory.</i> By T. Mead.
"	10	<i>The Angel of Death.</i> By G. Conquest.
"	10	<i>Past Midnight.</i>
"	17	<i>Blondin.</i> (Farce.)
July	1	<i>The Labour Question, or Honour and Industry.</i>
"	10	<i>Sarah the Jewess.</i>
"	15	<i>The Home in the Heart, or Life's Pilot.</i>
"	25	<i>The Maid of all Work.</i> (Farce.)
Aug.	8	<i>Mathilde, or the Mulatto.</i>
"	12	<i>Robert Lagrange.</i>
"	12	<i>The Serpent on the Hearth.</i>

PLAYS AT THE GRECIAN (1851 ONWARDS)

Sept.	4	<i>Bound Apprentice to a Waterman.</i>
"	5	<i>Piquillo Allega.</i>
"	11	<i>Vanity.</i>
"	12	<i>Scattered Leaves.</i>
"	19	<i>A Trip to Richmond.</i>
"	28	<i>Family Treason.</i>
Oct.	10	<i>Mountain Torrents.</i>
"	14	<i>The White Château, or Present, Past and Future.</i>
"	16	<i>The Victory of the Heart.</i>
"	28	<i>Two Lodgers for One Lodging. (Farce.)</i>
Nov.	4	<i>Presumptive Evidence.</i>
"	4	<i>Card Drawing.</i>
"	6	<i>The Wife.</i> By Sheridan Knowles.
"	6	<i>Othello.</i> (3rd Act.)
"	6	<i>Belphegor.</i>
"	6	<i>The Story of a Night.</i>
"	11	<i>Mary Barton.</i>
"	25	<i>The Dead Woman's Secret.</i>
Dec.	5	<i>The Peerless Pool. (Farce.)</i>

1862

March	3	<i>The Graven Image, or the Artist of Rome.</i>
"	14	<i>The Ghost Hunters, or the Colleen Dhas.</i>
"	19	<i>Eliza Holmes.</i>
April	21	<i>The Realities of Life.</i> By G. Conquest.
"	21	<i>Ruthven.</i> By A. Harris.
"	21	<i>Flora and Zephyr. (Entertainment.)</i>
May	12	<i>The Creole.</i>
"	12	<i>The Man of the Red House.</i>
June	4	<i>A Life's Revenge.</i> By W. E. Suter.
"	4	<i>The Carpenter of Rouen.</i>
"	9	<i>A Moment of Terror.</i> By G. Conquest.
Sept.	22	<i>The Hanged Man.</i> By G. Conquest.
Oct.	6	<i>The Devil's Gap.</i> By G. Conquest.
Nov.	3	<i>Under the Law.</i>
"	3	<i>La Vivandière. (Ballet.)</i>
"	7	<i>The Heart of Midlothian.</i>
"	10	<i>The Cross-Roads of Life; or The Scamps of London.</i>
Nov.	17	<i>It Never Rains but it Pours. (Farce.)</i>
Dec.	8	<i>Mary Graham.</i>

1863

Feb.	7	<i>The Ghost-Hunters.</i>
"	7	<i>The Spider and the Fly.</i>
"	23	<i>The Shadow of Wrong, or Threat for Threat.</i>
"	26	<i>The Pride of Life.</i>

## APPENDICES

March	23	<i>Wreck and Rescue.</i>
„	26	<i>The Wanderer's Fortune.</i>
„	26	<i>The Heiress of Aragon.</i>
„	25	<i>A Life for a Life, or The Reprieve.</i>
April	20	<i>The Recluse of the Forest.</i>
„	29	<i>The Dogs of Australia.</i>
May	4	<i>Amy Arlington, or the Murder in the Oak Coppice.</i>
„	24	<i>The Bridal Phantom, or the Secret of Life.</i>
June	4	<i>The Phantom Fight.</i>
„	4	<i>Spring-Heel'd Jack.</i>
„	15	<i>First Love, or the Widowed Bride.</i>
July	10	<i>Whom shall I Marry? (Farce.)</i> By W. E. Suter.
„	20	<i>The Motto on the Duke's Crest.</i> By G. Conquest.
Aug.	15	<i>False and True, or Marriage by Lottery.</i>
Sept.	14	<i>Alone in the World, or Home and the Homeless.</i>
„	30	<i>The Lover's Leap.</i>
Oct.	10	<i>The Captain of the Vulture.</i>
Nov.	12	<i>The Waiter at the Eagle.</i> (Farce.) By W. E. Suter.

### 1864

Jan.	11	<i>Rat of Rat's Castle.</i> By J. B. Johnstone.
Feb.	15	<i>Deborah, or the Jewish Outcast.</i>
April	4	<i>Kate Kearney.</i>
„	4	<i>Two Lodgers to one Lodging.</i> (Farce.)
„	11	<i>Kate of Killarney</i>
„	21	<i>Dred</i>
July	5	<i>Broken Ties.</i>
July	27	<i>The Lost Inheritance.</i>
Sept.	28	<i>The Phantom Captain.</i>
Oct.	6	<i>We all have our little Faults.</i> (Farce.) By W. E. Suter.

### 1865

April	22	<i>One Tree Square.</i>
May	9	<i>Aurora, or the Goddess of Morning.</i> (Ballet.)
„	31	<i>A Fête at Seville.</i>
Oct.	3	<i>Jupiter Choff.</i>
„	12	<i>Folly Fête, or the May Queen.</i>

### 1866

Feb.	5	<i>A Moment of Terror.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	12	<i>The Brigands of Calabria.</i> By W. E. Suter.
„	26	<i>Rocamboles.</i>
March	29	<i>Love in a Tub.</i> (Farce.)
April	20	<i>The Poor of the London Streets.</i> By D. Boucicault.
„	19	<i>Alone in the World.</i>

PLAYS AT THE GRECIAN (1851 ONWARDS)

April	18	<i>East Lynne.</i>
„	25	<i>The Life of a Miner.</i>
May	9	<i>Dead Men Tell No Tales.</i>
„	21	<i>The Spring and Fall of Life.</i> By F. B. Stanley.
„	31	<i>Tom Sheppard.</i>
June	11	<i>The Child Stealer.</i> By W. E. Suter.
„	21	<i>A Woman of the World.</i> By W. E. Suter.
„	25	<i>Home in the Heart.</i>
July	2	<i>Strange but True.</i> By S. Daryl.
„	5	<i>The Sons of Freedom.</i>
„	9	<i>Holly Bush Hall.</i>
„	16	<i>A Lion's Love.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	30	<i>Flowers of the Forest.</i> By J. B. Buckstone.
Aug.	2	<i>The Boy Smuggler.</i>
„	6	<i>A Gleam of Hope.</i>
„	13	<i>The Bargeman of the Thames.</i> By T. Mead.
„	23	<i>Persecution.</i>
„	27	<i>Temptation, or the Fatal Brand.</i>
Sept.	3	<i>The Orange Girl.</i> By H. Leslie.
„	5	<i>The Son of the Sea.</i>
„	17	<i>The Sin and the Sorrow.</i> By H. Leslie.
„	10	<i>The Old Toll House.</i> By J. A. Cave.
„	20	<i>Hard Times.</i>
„	26	<i>Brother Bill and Me.</i> By W. E. Suter.
Oct.	11	<i>The Marble Maiden.</i>
„	18	<i>The Maniac Lover.</i>
„	17	<i>Old Phil Hardy, or Family Troubles.</i> By G. Conquest.
Nov.	5	<i>The Storm Signal.</i>
„	19	<i>Waiting for the Verdict.</i> By H. G. Hazlewood.
„	26	<i>Monte Christo.</i> [sic] By G. Conquest.
Dec.	3	<i>Flowers of the Forest.</i> By J. B. Buckstone.
„	10	<i>The Green Hills of the Far West.</i>
„	19	<i>Der Freischütz.</i>

1867

Feb.	9	<i>Lettre de Cachet.</i>
March	25	<i>The Long Strike.</i> By D. Boucicault.
April	1	<i>Temptation and Atonement.</i>
„	8	<i>Rob Roy.</i>
„	8	<i>Alone in the World.</i>
„	22	<i>The Sea of Ice.</i>
„	22	<i>Faust.</i>
„	22	<i>Macbeth.</i>
„	22	<i>Deborah.</i>
May	20	<i>Rescue on the Raft.</i> By G. Conquest.

## . APPENDICES

May	27	<i>Pirates of the Savannah.</i> By W. E. Suter.
June	3	<i>The Lone Château.</i> By John Banim.
„	10	<i>The Orphans' Legacy.</i> By A. Faucquez.
„	26	<i>Amy Robsart.</i> By C. Webb.
„	26	<i>Henri the Witless.</i> By W. E. Suter.
July	19	<i>A Sketch from the Louvre.</i> (Comedietta.)
Aug.	5	<i>Harvest Home.</i> By A. Halliday.
„	5	<i>Jack by the Hedge.</i>
„	10	<i>The Great City.</i> By A. Halliday.
Sept.	9	<i>The Wandering Boys.</i>
„	9	<i>The Porter's Knot.</i>
Oct.	10	<i>The Dagger and the Cross.</i> By Brownlow Hill.
„	10	<i>Manfred.</i>
Nov.	11	<i>Obliging a Friend.</i> (Farce.) By G. Conquest.
Dec.	12	<i>The Demon of Darkness.</i>
„	12	<i>Pizarro.</i>
„	12	<i>The Old Man's Bride.</i> By C. Webb.
„	30	<i>The Heart's Victory.</i>

1868

Feb.	17	<i>Ruy Blas.</i>
„	22	<i>First Love.</i> By W. E. Suter.
April	2	<i>The Labour Question.</i> By T. Mead.
„	2	<i>False and True.</i>
„	6	<i>Time and Tide.</i> By H. Leslie.
„	20	<i>The Flying Scud.</i> By D. Boucicault.
„	27	<i>The Ghost Hunters, or the Colleen Dhas.</i> By G. Conquest (from J. Banim).
May	25	<i>The Corsican Brothers.</i>
„	25	<i>It's Never too Late to Mend.</i> By C. Reade.
July	6	<i>Revelations of London.</i> By C. H. Stevenson.
„	12	<i>The World We Live In.</i> (Same play.) By C. H. Stevenson.
„	12	<i>The Lace-Maker of Paris.</i>
„	20	<i>Three Christmas Nights.</i>
Aug.	10	<i>Poor Humanity.</i>
„	17	<i>Arrah-na-Pogue.</i> By D. Boucicault.
„	17	<i>Never Reckon Your Chickens.</i> (Farce.) By W. E. Suter.
„	30	<i>The Scamps of London.</i> By J. W. Moncrieff.
Sept.	14	<i>Whitefriars.</i>
Oct.	5	<i>Miriam's Crime.</i> By T. Craven.
„	8	<i>Spiders and Flies.</i> By Elliot Galer.
„	8	<i>The Angel of Death.</i> By G. Conquest.
Nov.	14	<i>Curling Irons and Capers.</i> (Farce.)
„	16	<i>A Night of Terror, or the Lone Château.</i> By J. Banim.
„	30	<i>Time and Tide.</i> By H. Leslie.

PLAYS AT THE GRECIAN (1851 ONWARDS)

1869

March	1	<i>The Toilers of the Thames.</i> By W. R. Waldron.
April	19	<i>The Old Man's Bride.</i>
"	26	<i>The Lancashire Lass.</i> By H. J. Byron.
"	26	<i>The Fugitive.</i> By G. Conquest.
May	17	<i>The Streets to the Hulks.</i> By G. Conquest.
July	5	<i>Ruthven.</i> By A. Harris.
"	5	<i>Kate of Killarney.</i>
Aug.	2	<i>Blow for Blow.</i> By H. J. Byron.
"	2	<i>Alone in the World.</i>
"	16	<i>The Reprieve.</i> By W. Travers.
Oct.	4	<i>The Wanderer.</i> By W. Travers.
"	11	<i>The Corsican Brothers.</i>
Nov.	1	<i>Flower-Makers and Heart-Breakers.</i> By H. C. Hazlewood.
"	15	<i>The Orange Girl.</i> By Henry Leslie.
"	22	<i>The Mariner's Compass.</i> By Henry Leslie.
"	27	<i>It's Never Too Late to Mend.</i> By C. Reade.
Dec.	6	<i>The Lancashire Lass.</i> By H. J. Byron.
"	6	<i>The Old Toll House.</i> By J. A. Cave.

1870

Jan.	10	<i>False and True.</i>
Feb.	9	<i>Aurora Floyd.</i>
"	21	<i>Lion's Love.</i> By G. Conquest.
March	21	<i>The Turn of the Tide.</i> By F. C. Burnand.
"	26	<i>Eric the Phantom.</i> By W. E. Suter.
April	4	<i>Tom and Jerry.</i> By W. T. Moncrieff.
"	4	<i>Monte Christo.</i> By G. Conquest.
"	18	<i>Nobody's Child.</i> By Watts Phillips.
"	18	<i>Quasimodo, the Deformed.</i> (Burlesque.) By H. Spry.
May	2	<i>Violet, or the Life of an Actress.</i> By W. E. Suter.
"	9	<i>The London Streets.</i>
"	23	<i>The Realities of Life.</i> By G. Conquest.
"	30	<i>Satan, or the Strange Intruder.</i>
June	6	<i>The Death Trap.</i> By J. Redding Ware.
"	20	<i>The Old Toll House.</i> By J. A. Cave.
"	20	<i>Sunlight through the Mist.</i> By G. Conquest.
"	20	<i>Don Juan.</i> (Burlesque.) By H. Spry.
"	27	<i>The Octoroon.</i> By D. Boucicault.
July	18	<i>The Clam.</i> By Chas. H. Rose.
"	18	<i>The French Revolution.</i>
Aug.	1	<i>The Weeds and Flowers of Erin.</i> By G. H. Macdermott.
"	8	<i>The Devil and the Deserter.</i>
"	22	<i>Camilla's Husband.</i> By Watts Phillips.
Sept.	5	<i>Rip Van Winkle.</i>

# APPENDICES

Sept.	5	<i>Ernest Maltravers.</i>
„	19	<i>Better Late than Never.</i> By G. W. Beverley.
Oct.	3	<i>David Copperfield.</i>
„	4	<i>The Expected General.</i> (Farce.)
„	24	<i>The Headsman's Axe.</i>
Nov.	14	<i>The Willow Pool.</i>
„	21	<i>A Flash of Lightning.</i> By Daly and Murdoch.
Dec.	12	<i>The Waiter at the Eagle.</i> (Farce.) By W. E. Suter.
„	12	<i>The Lone Château.</i> By J. Banim.
„	24	<i>The Whistler.</i>

1871

Feb.	27	<i>A Flash of Lightning.</i> By Daly and Murdoch.
March	6	<i>Blanche Westgarth.</i> By J. T. Lucas.
„	27	<i>Amy Robsart.</i> By C. Webb.
May	8	<i>Playing at Loo-Loo.</i> (Farce.) By G. H. Macdermott.
„	15	<i>The Orange Girl.</i> By F. Leslie and N. Howe.
„	20	<i>Fairly Foiled.</i> By Oswald Allen.
June	12	<i>Sid, or Good out of Evil.</i> By Paul Meritt.
„	28	<i>The Rival Poet.</i>
July	12	<i>Primrose Farm.</i> By H. A. Major.
„	31	<i>Driven from Home.</i> By G. H. Macdermott.
Sept.	11	<i>Honour.</i> By J. Levey.
„	11	<i>Against the Stream.</i> By P. Meritt.
„	28	<i>Once too Often, or Married not Mated.</i> By G. Conquest.
Oct.	5	<i>Not in Vain.</i> By P. Meritt.
„	9	<i>Mercy's Choice.</i> By F. Marchant.
Nov.	13	<i>True as Steel.</i> By Ed. Romaine.
„	20	<i>The Motto on the Duke's Crest.</i> By G. Conquest.
Dec.	7	<i>Never Despair.</i> By W. James.

1872

Feb.	2	<i>Pauline.</i>
March	3	<i>The Ticket-of-Leave Man.</i>
„	4	<i>The Polish Jew.</i> By J. Redding Ware.
April	1	<i>Glin Gath.</i> By P. Meritt.
„	5	<i>Aileen, or Foiled at Last.</i> By J. F. Collins.
May	20	<i>Strangers Yet.</i> By C. Oswald Allen.
June	2	<i>The Wandering Jew.</i>
„	10	<i>It's Never Too Late to Mend.</i> By C. Reade.
„	14	<i>Nearly Stranded.</i>
„	15	<i>East Lynne.</i>
„	17	<i>Home in the Heart.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	23	<i>Marriage Lines.</i>
„	24	<i>The Lady of Lyons.</i> By Bulwer Lytton.

PLAYS AT THE GRECIAN (1851 ONWARDS)

July	1	<i>The Huguenots.</i>
"	4	<i>Macbeth.</i> By Shakespeare.
"	11	<i>Forsaken.</i> By H. Marchant.
"	29	<i>Thad, or Linked by Love.</i> By P. Meritt.
Aug.	4	<i>Bound or Free.</i> By T. Mead.
"	19	<i>A Tangled Skein.</i> By C. Allen and D. Fleck.
Sept.	2	<i>The Great City.</i> By A. Halliday.
Oct.	11	<i>The Blind Fiddler.</i>
"	17	<i>British Born.</i> By Meritt and Pettitt.
Nov.	11	<i>The Octoroon.</i> By D. Boucicault.
"	11	<i>Gale Briezely.</i>
"	12	<i>Mystic No. VII, or Withered Leaves.</i>

1873

Feb.	25	<i>The Old Mint.</i> By J. B. Johnstone.
April	14	<i>Found Dead in the Streets.</i> By W. R. Waldon.
May	5	<i>Watch and Wait.</i>
"	5	<i>Life of an Actress.</i> By W. E. Suter.
June	2	<i>Beneath the Surface.</i> By Mortimer Murdoch.
Aug.	7	<i>Mazeppa.</i>
"	7	<i>Claude du Val.</i>
"	13	<i>The House in the Valley.</i>
"	13	<i>Star of the Rhine.</i> (Ballet.)
"	13	<i>The Old Sergeant.</i>
"	13	<i>It's Never Too Late to Mend.</i> By C. Reade.
"	13	<i>The Heart's Victory.</i> By T. Mead.
Sept.	25	<i>Chopsticks and Spikins.</i> (Farce.) By P. Meritt.
"	28	<i>The Elixir of Life.</i> By G. Conquest.
Oct.	20	<i>Lily Dale.</i>
Nov.	17	<i>The Flying Scud.</i> By D. Boucicault.
"	17	<i>A Lion's Love.</i> By G. Conquest.

1874

Feb.	16	<i>British Born.</i> By Meritt and Pettitt.
March	9	<i>Formosa, or the Railroad to Ruin.</i> By D. Boucicault.
"	23	<i>The Old Toll House.</i> By J. A. Cave.
April	6	<i>Velvet and Rags.</i> By Conquest and Meritt.
"	20	<i>Under the Gaslight.</i> By Aug. Daly.
"	27	<i>The Three Brothers of Paris.</i> By A. Rayner.
May	4	<i>Time and Tide.</i> By H. Leslie.
"	19	<i>The Motto on the Duke's Crest.</i> By G. Conquest.
"	25	<i>Hand and Glove.</i> By Conquest and Meritt.
June	26	<i>Madge's Adventure.</i> (Farce.)
"	29	<i>Glin Gath.</i> By P. Meritt.
Aug.	27	<i>Seven Sins, or Passion's Paradise.</i> By Conquest and Meritt.

## APPENDICES

Aug.	31	<i>For Dear Life.</i> By W. Muskerrey.
Oct.	12	<i>Iron Hands.</i> By Harry M. Pitt.
„	22	<i>The Word of Honour.</i> By P. Meritt.
„	26	<i>The Blind Sister.</i> By Conquest and Meritt.
„	26	<i>Jack Long of Texas.</i>
Dec.	7	<i>The Octoroon.</i> By D. Boucicault.

### 1875

June	21	<i>Rescue on the Raft.</i> By G. Conquest.
„	21	<i>The Angel of Death.</i> By G. Conquest.
July	5	<i>Seeing the Grecian Panto.</i> (Farce.)
„	12	<i>Dead to the World.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
Sept.	13	<i>The Promised Land.</i> By H. Pettitt.
Oct.	14	<i>Sentenced to Death.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.

### 1876

March	13	<i>Snatched from the Grave.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
June	15	<i>Queen's Evidence.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
July	19	<i>L'Abbé Lafarge.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
Aug.	1	<i>Neck or Nothing.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
Oct.	5	<i>The Sole Survivor.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.

### 1877

Feb.	5	<i>Wait for the End.</i>
March	21	<i>The Flying Dutchman.</i>
April	2	<i>Schriffen, the One-Eyed Pilot.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
May	21	<i>During Her Majesty's Pleasure.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
June	5	<i>Golden Daggers.</i>
Oct.	29	<i>Bound to Succeed.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.

### 1878

April	30	<i>Notice to Quit.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
June	10	<i>The London Arab.</i>
„	29	<i>The Red Hand of Justice.</i>
Aug.	5	<i>The Green Lanes of England.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
Oct.	28	<i>A Royal Pardon.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.

*Note:* George Conquest gave up the Grecian on March 17, 1879. All plays after that date are under the management of T. G. Clark, though Conquest returned to produce several plays during 1879.

### 1879

March	18	<i>The Last Stroke of Midnight.</i> By James Guiver.
„	18	<i>Seven Years Ago.</i> By H. P. Grattan.

PLAYS AT THE GRECIAN (1851 ONWARDS)

April	14	<i>Tot.</i> By Fred Hazleton.
„	28	<i>King George's Shilling.</i> By Edward Stirling.
May	31	<i>The Queen's Colours.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.
Sept.	8	<i>The Black Flag.</i> By H. Pettitt.
Oct.	4	<i>The Mesmerist.</i> By Conquest and H. Robinson.
„	4	<i>Honours.</i> By Fawney Vane.
„	23	<i>The Terror of London.</i> By W. James and H. Whyte.
„	25	<i>The Death Warrant.</i> By H. P. Grattan.
Nov.	12	<i>An Old Man's Darling.</i> By H. Pettitt.

1880

May	14	<i>Missing Waterloo.</i>
„	22	<i>The Lost Witness.</i> By Pettitt and Meritt.
Oct.	12	<i>The Bittern Swamp.</i>
„	16	<i>Black Mail.</i> By Watts Phillips.
Dec.	27	<i>King Frolic.</i> (Pantomime.) By H. Pettitt.

1881

March	26	<i>The Devil's in the Room.</i> (Farce.)
„	31	<i>Area Belle.</i> (Farce.)
April	16	<i>Australia.</i>
„	16	<i>Royalist and Republican.</i>
May	14	<i>Proof.</i>
„	14	<i>A Roland for an Oliver.</i>
June	4	<i>Arrah-na-Pogue.</i> By D. Boucicault.
July	16	<i>East Lynne.</i>
„	16	<i>William Tell.</i>
„	30	<i>The Sea of Ice.</i>
Aug.	27	<i>Don César de Bazan.</i>
Sept.	18	<i>The Merchant of Venice.</i>
„	18	<i>The Lonely Man of the Ocean.</i>
„	24	<i>London Life.</i>
„	24	<i>The Idiot Witness.</i>
Dec.	11	<i>D.T., or Lost by Drink.</i>
„	27	<i>Happy-go-Lucky.</i> (Pantomime.) By H. Spry.

1882

March	4	<i>Garrick.</i>
„	18	<i>The Shaughbrann.</i> By D. Boucicault.
April	8	<i>The Duke's Motto: "I am Here."</i>
May	6	<i>Waiting for the Verdict.</i>
„	27	<i>Human Nature.</i>
June	3	<i>Dominique the Deserter.</i>
„	10	<i>A Woman's Vengeance.</i>

## APPENDICES

June	10	<i>Life for Life.</i>
„	24	<i>Richelieu.</i>
July	1	<i>The Two Orphans.</i>
„	22	<i>Guilty or not Guilty.</i>
„	29	<i>Lost in London.</i>
Aug.	5	<i>Don César de Bazan.</i>

*Note:* On August 9th the Grecian was taken over by the Salvation Army and ceased to be a theatre.

## *Plays Produced at the Surrey (1881 onwards)*

(Compiled from the same sources, and with the same reservations, as the  
Grecian plays.)

### 1881

- |      |    |   |
|------|----|---|
| Aug. | 2  | <i>The Danites.</i>                     |
| „    | 16 | <i>The New Babylon.</i> By Paul Meritt. |
| Oct. | 3  | <i>Mankind.</i> By Conquest and Meritt. |

### 1882

- |       |    |   |
|-------|----|---|
| March | 11 | <i>The Green Lanes of England.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt. |
| April | —  | <i>British Born.</i> By Meritt and Pettitt.                 |
| May   | 13 | <i>It's Never Too Late to Mend.</i> By Chas. Reade.         |
| „     | 29 | <i>The Hoop of Gold.</i>                                    |
| June  | 12 | <i>Queen's Evidence.</i> By Conquest and Pettitt.           |
| „     | 28 | <i>Taken from Life.</i>                                     |
| July  | 7  | <i>Men and Women.</i> By Mrs. R. Fairbairn.                 |
| „     | 27 | <i>Law, not Justice.</i> By A. C. Calmour.                  |
| „     | 31 | <i>Unknown, a River Mystery.</i> By John A. Stevens.        |
| Sept. | 9  | <i>Flip, Flap, Flop.</i> By P. Meritt.                      |
| Aug.  | 21 | <i>Real Life.</i> By R. Dodson.                             |
| Oct.  | 2  | <i>For Ever.</i> By Conquest and Meritt.                    |
| Dec.  | 5  | <i>Jane Eyre.</i>   |

### 1883

- |       |    |  |
|-------|----|--|
| March | 5  | <i>Hand and Glove.</i> By Conquest and Meritt. |
| „     | 24 | <i>The Miracle.</i> By W. Howell-Poole.        |
| April | 16 | <i>The New Babylon.</i> By P. Meritt.          |
| May   | 21 | <i>The Hidden Million.</i>                     |
| „     | 21 | <i>Black Ey'd Susan.</i>                       |
| May   | 29 | <i>Blow for Blow.</i> By H. J. Byron.          |
| June  | 18 | <i>Pluck.</i> By Pettitt and Aug. Harris.      |
| July  | 30 | <i>Rags and Bones.</i> By F. A. Scudamore.     |
| Aug.  | 20 | <i>The Romany Rye.</i> By G. Sims.             |
| Oct.  | 8  | <i>Mankind.</i> By Conquest and Meritt.        |

### 1884

- |       |    |  |
|-------|----|--|
| March | 24 | <i>The Bread Winner.</i>                             |
| April | 22 | <i>The King of Diamonds.</i> By Conquest and Meritt. |

## APPENDICES

- Aug. 25 *The Outcast Poor.* By Julian Cross.  
 Sept. 15 *Monte Cristo.* By G. Conquest.  
 „ 29 *Sins of the City.* By Conquest and Meritt.

### 1885

- April 20 *Till Death Us Do Part.* By George Comer.  
 May 18 *The White Slave.*  
 June 26 *Grandfather's Secret.* (1-act.)  
 Aug. 17 *Love and Money.*  
 Sept. 21 *Devil's Luck or the Man She Loved.* By Conquest and Tinsley.  
 Oct. 22 *Dead Beat.* By Conquest and Comer.

### 1886

- June 28 *A Ring of Iron.* By Frank Harvey.  
 Aug. 2 *Hoodman Blind.* By H. A. Jones and Barrett.  
 „ 2 *First Act of Belphegor.*  
 „ 28 *Jo.* (Bleak House.)  
 Sept. 13 *Pluck.* By Pettitt and Harris.  
 „ 27 *The Crimes of Paris.* By Conquest and Meritt.  
 Oct. 18 *Saved from the Street.* By Conquest and R. Eaton.  
 Nov. 27 *Secrets of the Police.* By Mark Melford.  
 „ 27 *Boots at the Swan.* (Farce.)

### 1887

- March 15 *The New Babylon.* By P. Meritt.  
 April 4 *The Romany Rye.* By G. R. Sims.  
 „ 25 *The Black Flag.* By H. Pettitt.  
 May 9 *The Green Lanes of England.* By Conquest and Pettitt.  
 „ 30 *Jack in the Box.*  
 July 4 *Man to Man.* By William Bourne.  
 „ 25 *Current Cash.* By C. A. Clarke.  
 „ 25 *Alone in London.* By R. Buchanan and H. Jay.  
 Sept. 20 *The Noble Vagabond.* By H. A. Jones.  
 Oct. 17 *The Strangers of Paris.* By A. Shirley.  
 Nov. 7 *A Dead Man's Gold.* By Conquest and Spry.  
 Dec. 10 *For Ever.* By Conquest and Meritt.

### 1888

- Feb. 26 *The Harbour Lights.* By Pettitt and Sims.  
 April 2 *A Dark Secret.* By J. Dougiass.  
 „ 30 *The Colleen Bawn.* By D. Boucicault.  
 May 26 *The Stowaway.* By Tom Craven.  
 June 4 *The Fugitive.* By Tom Craven.  
 July 2 *The World against Her.* By Frank Harvey.  
 „ 9 *Is Life worth Living?* By F. A. Scudamore.

# PLAYS AT THE SURREY (1881 ONWARDS)

Aug.	28	<i>Human Nature.</i> By Pettitt and Harris.
Sept.	17	<i>The Golden Ladder.</i> By J. P. Simpson and Barrett.
Oct.	8	<i>Held by the Enemy.</i> By Wm. Gillette.
„	22	<i>Youth.</i> By Meritt and Aug. Harris.
Dec.	12	<i>The Strangers of Paris.</i> By A. Shirley.

## 1889

Feb.	18	<i>The Bells of Haslemere.</i> By Pettitt and S. Grundy.
April	20	<i>The Union Jack.</i>
May	6	<i>For a Life.</i> By J. M'Closkey.
June	3	<i>The Two Orphans.</i> By John Oxenford.
„	17	<i>The World Against Her.</i> By Frank Harvey.
Aug.	2	<i>Mankind.</i> By Conquest and Meritt.
„	9	<i>Hands Across the Sea.</i>
Sept.	9	<i>My Jack.</i> By B. Landeck.
Nov.	4	<i>The Miser's Will.</i> By Tom Craven.
Dec.	3	<i>The Golden Ladder.</i> By J. P. Simpson and Barrett.

## 1890

Feb.	17	<i>Hands across the Sea.</i>
March	24	<i>Hand in Hand.</i> By Edward Darbey.
„	10	<i>A Double Dose.</i> (Farce.) By A. Shirley.
April	8	<i>A Dark Secret.</i> By J. Douglass.
May	12	<i>The Bells of Haslemere.</i> By Pettitt and S. Grundy.
June	23	<i>The Dangers of London.</i> By F. A. Scudamore.
Aug.	25	<i>Master and Man.</i> By Pettitt and G. R. Sims.
Sept.	13	<i>The Village Forge.</i> By Conquest and T. Craven.
Oct.	27	<i>Mystery of the Seven Sisters.</i> By F. A. Scudamore.
Nov.	17	<i>The Harbour Lights.</i> By Pettitt and G. R. Sims.

## 1891

March	—	<i>My Jack.</i> By B. Landeck.
„	12	<i>The World against Her.</i> By Frank Harvey.
April	12	<i>A Ring of Iron.</i> By Frank Harvey.
May	14	<i>Alone in London.</i> By Buchanan and H. Jay.
June	8	<i>Land of the Living.</i> By Frank Harvey.
July	6	<i>A Big Fortune.</i> By William Bourne.
Aug.	2	<i>The Black Flag.</i> By H. Pettitt.
Sept.	6	<i>Flying from Justice.</i>
Oct.	5	<i>Grif.</i> By W. Lestocq.
Nov.	2	<i>Round the Ring.</i> By P. Meritt.
„	23	<i>Light Ahead.</i> By H. Leonard.
Dec.	7	<i>The Lightning's Flash.</i> By A. Shirley.

# APPENDICES

1892

- Feb. 22 *The English Rose.* By Buchanan and Simpson.  
 March 7 *A Man in a Thousand.* By Clarence Burnette.  
 „ 21 *The Village Forge.* By Conquest and T. Craven.  
 April 4 *Master and Man.* By Pettitt and G. R. Sims.  
 „ 18 *Arrah-na-Pogue.* By Boucicault.  
 May 8 *A Million of Money.* By Pettitt and Aug. Harris.  
 „ 20 *A Ring of Iron.* By Frank Harvey.  
 June 13 *A Fight for Honour.* By Frank Harvey.  
 July 11 *Black Diamonds.* By L. S. Denbigh and F. Mackay.  
 Aug. 1 *Lost in London.* By Watts Phillips.  
 „ 8 *The Trumpet Call.*  
 Sept. 5 *The Grip of Iron* (this is *The Stranglers of Paris*). By A. Shirley.  
 „ 5 *Clementina.* (Farce.) By Ed. Moncrieff.  
 „ 19 *Our Native Home.* By C. Whitlock and J. Sargent.  
 Oct. 10 *Time, the Avenger.* By Tom Craven.  
 „ 28 *Old London.* (*Jack Sheppard.*) By A. Shirley.  
 Nov. 26 *Arrah-na-Pogue.* By D. Boucicault.  
 Dec. 12 *It's Never Too Late to Mend.* By Chas. Reade.  
 „ 19 *Midnight, or the Bells of Notre Dame.* By Shirley and Landeck.

1893

- Feb. 27 *The Prodigal Daughter.* By Pettitt and Aug. Harris.  
 March 19 *A Yorkshire Lass.*  
 April 3 *Money Mad.* By Steele Mackay.  
 „ 24 *Capital and Labour.* By W. J. Patmore and A. B. Moss.  
 May 8 *The Trumpet Call.*  
 „ 22 *Mankind.* By Conquest and Meritt.  
 „ 29 *The Father's Oath.*  
 July 3 *The Diamond Gang.* By Edward Darbey.  
 Aug. 7 *My Jack.* By B. Landeck.  
 „ 14 *The Prodigal Daughter.* By Pettitt and Aug. Harris.  
 „ 28 *True as Steel.*  
 Sept. 11 *Sons of Erin.* By W. J. Patmore.  
 „ 25 *A Lion's Heart.* By Shirley and Landeck.  
 Oct. 16 *In the Moonlight.* By Mark Melford.  
 Nov. 6 *The Bush King.* By W. J. Lincoln.  
 „ 20 *Driven from Home.*  
 Dec. 11 *The King of Crime* (revival of *Midnight*). By Shirley and Landeck.  
 „ 18 *To Call her Mine.* By B. Landeck.

1894

- March 3 *Queen's Evidence.* By Conquest and Pettitt.  
 „ 24 *The Lightning's Flash.* By A. Shirley.  
 „ 24 *The Missing Link.* (Farce.) By A. Shirley.

PLAYS AT THE SURREY (1881 ONWARDS)

April	6	<i>A Life of Pleasure.</i> By Pettitt and Aug. Harris.
May	7	<i>Fettered Lives.</i> By Harold Whyte.
"	14	<i>The Crimes of Paris.</i> By Conquest and Meritt.
June	21	<i>The Mask of Guilt.</i> By A. Shirley and Sutton Vane.
Aug.	5	<i>The World.</i> By Meritt, Pettitt and Harris.
"	19	<i>In the Ranks.</i> By H. Pettitt.
Sept.	3	<i>Human Nature.</i> By Pettitt and Aug. Harris.
"	17	<i>The Harbour Lights.</i> By Pettitt and G. R. Sims.
Oct.	1	<i>Phantoms.</i> By Conquest and Shirley.
Nov.	3	<i>Shall We Forgive Her?</i> By Frank Harvey.
"	17	<i>Youth.</i> By Meritt and Aug. Harris.
Dec.	3	<i>A Lion's Heart.</i> By Shirley and Landeck.
"	17	<i>A Daughter's Honour.</i> By Shirley and Landeck.

1895

Feb.	18	<i>Driven from Home.</i>
March	4	<i>Hands across the Sea.</i> By H. Pettitt.
"	18	<i>The Silver King.</i> By Wilson Barrett.
April	1	<i>The Broad Arrow.</i>
"	15	<i>The Work Girl.</i> By Conquest and Shirley.
June	6	<i>Settling Day.</i> By F. A. Scudamore.
July	8	<i>A Fight for Life.</i> By F. A. Scudamore.
Aug.	5	<i>The World's Verdict.</i> By A. Jefferson.
"	26	<i>The Golden Ladder.</i> By Simpson and Barrett.
Sept.	9	<i>The Winning Hand.</i> By Conquest and St. A. Miller.
Oct.	28	<i>A Tale of the Thames.</i> By Conquest and Shirley.
Dec.	2	<i>The Lights o' London.</i> By G. R. Sims.

1896

March	2	<i>The Raid in the Transvaal.</i> (Revival of <i>The King of Diamonds</i> .) By Conquest and Meritt.
"	16	<i>Lost in London.</i> By Watts Phillips.
April	6	<i>Tommy Atkins.</i> By Shirley and Landeck.
June	1	<i>Under Remand.</i> By Stockton and Hudson.
"	8	<i>The Two Hussars.</i> By W. Burnet and H. Bruce.
"	15	<i>The Serpent's Coil.</i> By Hill-Mitchelson and C. H. Longdon.
"	29	<i>When Greek Meets Greek.</i> By Joseph Hatton.
July	6	<i>Greed of Gold.</i> By H. P. Silva.
Aug.	3	<i>Against the Tide.</i> By Hazlewood and Scudamore.
Sept.	14	<i>The Work Girl.</i> By Conquest and Shirley.
Oct.	5	<i>The Cruel City.</i> By J. W. Jones and G. Warden.
"	31	<i>The Lights o' London.</i> By G. R. Sims.
Nov.	23	<i>Straight from the Heart.</i>
Dec.	9	<i>An English Woman.</i> By St. Aubyn Miller.
"	14	<i>The Vendetta.</i>
"	21	<i>The Girl of my Heart.</i> By H. Leonard.

## APPENDICES

1897

- |       |    |   |
|-------|----|---|
| March | 8  | <i>A Daughter of Ishmael.</i> By W. Patmore.                        |
| „     | 15 | <i>Old London (Jack Sheppard).</i> By Arthur Shirley.               |
| April | 4  | <i>The English Rose.</i> By Buchanan and Simpson.                   |
| May   | 10 | <i>Tommy Atkins.</i> By Shirley and Landeck.                        |
| May   | 21 | <i>The Dark Continent.</i> By Morell and Mouillet.                  |
| June  | 7  | <i>Driven from Home.</i>  |
| July  | 5  | <i>A Night in Armour.</i> (Mus. Comedy.) By W. Burnot and H. Bruce. |
| Aug.  | 2  | <i>The Hand of Providence.</i> By Stephen Bond.                     |
| „     | 16 | <i>Half-Mast High.</i> By Tom Craven.                               |
| „     | 23 | <i>Two Little Vagabonds.</i>  |
| Sept. | 20 | <i>Drink.</i>   |
| Oct.  | 11 | <i>The Girl of my Heart.</i> By H. Leonard.                         |
| Nov.  | 13 | <i>The Scales of Justice.</i>                                       |
| Dec.  | 10 | <i>An English Woman.</i> By St. Aubyn Miller.                       |
| „     | 17 | <i>Bantry Bay.</i> (One-act.) By Stephen Bond.                      |
| „     | 17 | <i>A Woman's Heart.</i> (One-act.) By R. S. Warren Bell.            |

1898

- |       |    |  |
|-------|----|--|
| Feb.  | 21 | <i>When the Lamps are Lighted.</i>                             |
| March | 22 | <i>The Motto on the Duke's Crest.</i> By Conquest.             |
| April | 5  | <i>The Black Flag.</i> By H. Pettitt.                          |
| „     | 29 | <i>Mary's Devotion.</i> By C. Frere.                           |
| June  | 6  | <i>No Actress.</i> (Farce.) By Hubert Bartlett.                |
| Aug.  | 1  | <i>The Christian's Cross.</i> By Clark Claypole.               |
| „     | 15 | <i>Flying from Justice.</i>                                    |
| Sept. | 2  | <i>The Sunny South.</i> By G. Darrell.                         |
| „     | 21 | <i>The Angel of Death.</i> By G. Conquest.                     |
| Oct.  | 3  | <i>The Girl of my Heart.</i> By H. Leonard.                    |
| „     | 17 | <i>Serving the Queen.</i> By H. Leonard.                       |
| „     | 31 | <i>The War of Wealth.</i>                                      |
| Nov.  | 21 | <i>Driven from Home.</i>                                       |
| Nov.  | 28 | <i>The War Correspondent.</i> By Mrs. G. Corbett and W. Boyne. |
| Dec.  | 5  | <i>The Scales of Justice.</i>                                  |
| „     | 12 | <i>Half-Mast High.</i> By Tom Craven.                          |

1899

- |       |    |  |
|-------|----|--|
| March | 6  | <i>Known to the Police.</i> By John Douglass.                  |
| „     | 20 | <i>A Dark Spirit.</i>  |
| April | 16 | <i>A London Arab.</i> By M. Walterton and F. Gilbert.          |
| May   | 8  | <i>Her Wedding Day.</i> By E. T. de Banzie.                    |
| July  | 17 | <i>Rogues and Vagabonds.</i> By Hill-Mitchelson and F. Benton. |
| July  | 24 | <i>The Terror of Paris.</i>                                    |

# PLAYS AT THE SURREY (1881 ONWARDS)

Sept.	29	<i>The Orphan Heiress.</i> By A. Jefferson.
Oct.	23	<i>On Active Service.</i> By H. Leonard.
„	30	<i>Crimes of Paris.</i> By Conquest and Meritt.
Dec.	4	<i>For a Child's Sake.</i> By H. Herman and M. Turner.

## 1900

June	4	<i>The Devil on Two Sticks.</i>
Sept.	24	<i>The Kitchen Girl.</i> (Farce.)
Oct.	8	<i>Beneath the Stars.</i> By Brandon Ellis.
Oct.	29	<i>The Fighting Fifth.</i> By Conquest and Leonard.
Dec.	10	<i>The Day of Reckoning.</i> By Beatrice Isaacson.

## 1901

June	3	<i>A Sister's Sacrifice.</i> By Montague Turner.
„	10	<i>The World, the Flesh and the Devil.</i> By Shirley and Vaucredson.
„	15	<i>London's Curse.</i> By E. Hoggan Armadale.
Aug.	5	<i>The Mysteries of London.</i> By Lewis Gilbert.

## 1902

June	5	<i>The Way Women Love.</i> By G. B. Nichols.
„	9	<i>The Life that Kills.</i> By Fred Moule.
„	23	<i>Was it Murder?</i> By F. Herbert and B. Daly.
July	14	<i>The Spiritualist.</i> By Fred Jarman.
„	28	<i>The Dawn of Freedom.</i> (Mus. Comedy.)
Sept.	15	<i>That Woman from France.</i> By Frank M. Thorne.
Oct.	13	<i>The London Fireman.</i> By Shirley and Conquest (Jr.).
Nov.	3	<i>Tempted to Sin.</i> By A. Conquest and G. Whyte.
„	24	<i>The Man She Loves.</i> By G. B. Nichols and F. Herbert.

## 1903

Feb.	9	<i>A City of Sin.</i> By Shirley and Muskerrey.
„	24	<i>Eve the Temptress.</i> By A. Conquest and Nichols.
March	30	<i>A Voice from the Grave.</i> By Planché and Denman-Wood.
April	6	<i>The Bones of Men.</i> By Cyril M. Church.
„	9	<i>Wife or Widow.</i> By Robert Oliver.
May	4	<i>The Hidden Crime.</i> By John P. Lockney.
„	18	<i>When Darkness Falls.</i>
„	18	<i>The Cry of the Children.</i>
„	25	<i>The Old, Old Story.</i> By G. B. Nichols.
June	29	<i>By Sheer Pluck.</i> By Bertram Diner.
Aug.	3	<i>A Traitor Prince.</i> By George A. de Grey.
„	8	<i>The Biggest Scamp on Earth.</i> By F. A. Scudamore.
Sept.	21	<i>Fiends of London.</i> By Herbert Fuller.
Nov.	2	<i>Her Partner in Sin.</i> By Nichols and Conquest (Jr.).
?		<i>Vultures of London, or in Toils of Terror.</i> By Julian Rochefort.

## APPENDICES

1904

- March 21 *The Curse of Crime.* By Julian Rochefort.  
May 30 *The Convent Ball.* By Auguste Tulloch.  
July 21 *The Last Shot.* By Ernest Leicester.  
„ 21 *The Jew's Revenge.* By Duse Mahomed.  
„ 23 *He, She and the Major.*

*Note: Conquest's Farewell Benefit, during week beginning July 18.*

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<p><i>Athenaeum</i>.  <i>Daily Telegraph</i>.  <i>Dramatic Magazine</i>.  <i>Entr'acte</i>.  <i>Era</i>.  <i>Evening Mail</i>.  <i>Harlequin</i>.  <i>Illustrated London News</i>.  <i>Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic</i>.  <i>Illustrated Times</i>.  <i>Imperial Gazette</i>.  <i>London Magazine</i>.  <i>London Telegraph</i>.  <i>Morning Advertiser</i>.</p>	<p><i>Morning Post</i>.  <i>Observer</i>.  <i>Punch</i>.  <i>Sunday Monitor</i>.  <i>Stage</i>.  <i>Sunday Times</i>.  <i>Theatre World</i>.  <i>Theatrical Inquisitor</i>.  <i>Theatrical Register</i>.  <i>Times</i>.  <i>Town</i>.  <i>True Sun</i>.  <i>Weekly Times</i>.</p>
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## General Index

Indexing has been particularly difficult, owing to the large number of namesakes. The following system has been adopted:

- (a) All Olivers *who used the name Conquest* have been listed as such. Up to 1883, however, their legal surname, given on documents, was Oliver.
- (b) Men of the same name but different generations have been distinguished by date of birth.
- (c) Women marrying *into* the Conquest family are listed under their married name, with cross-references to their original surname or stage name.
- (d) Women marrying *out* of the family are listed under their maiden name, with the married name in brackets.
- (e) Other actresses appear under the name best known to the public, with cross-references where necessary.
- (f) Play titles are indexed separately. Characters in plays are not indexed. Historical personages in plays (Napoleon, etc.) are treated as fictitious.
- (g) Places of entertainment are listed alphabetically under the collective rubrics *Pleasure Gardens* and *Theatres* (the latter including Saloons and Music Halls.)
- (h) The label "Actor," "Singer," etc., is attached when necessary, in lieu of christian name or initials.

Adam, Ronald, 230  
 Aenea, Mlle. (Mrs. Dando), 121  
 Agar, Mr., 40  
 Agate, James, 223, 224, 225, 227-8, 230, 232  
 Aldrich, Charles T., 174  
 Alexander, Sir George, 232  
 Allen, Jane (see *Conquest, Mrs. Benjamin, II*)  
 — Mr. and Mrs., 108  
 Alley, Mr., 34  
 Alt, Terry, 45  
 Anderson, James, 142, 192  
 Anspacher, Louis, 223  
 Archer, Mr. (Actor), 44  
 — William, 152, 153-4  
 Arne, Thomas A., 137  
 Arnold, A. Walter, 78-9  
 — Tom, 184  
 Arts Council, 237  
 Asaph Masonic Lodge, 169  
 Astley, John, 39, 80, 139  
 — Philip, 28, 39, 80, 136  
 Atkinson, Mrs. (Actress), 47  
 Aubrey, James, 113  
 Austin, Charles, 174  
 Aylmer, Felix, 227  
  
 Baddeley, Angela, 226  
 Baldwin, Mr. (Singer), 63  
 Balfour, Mr., 98  
 Balzac, H. de, 167  
 Bancroft, Lady (Marie Wilton), 79, 194-5,  
 207, 212  
 — Sir Squire, 207  
 Bankhead, Tallulah, 227  
 Bannerman, Margaret, 225, 226  
 Barker, Mr. (Bell-Founder), 61  
 Barnett, Miss (Dancer), 30  
 Barnum, Phineas T., 87, 184

Barrett, Oscar, 111, 164  
 Barry, Sheil, 215  
 Bateman, Isabel, 135  
 Beard, Thomas, 115, 166  
 Bedford, Mr. (Manager), 41  
 Behring, Issy (Isabella Broomhead), 211  
 Bellew, Kyrle, 146  
 Belmont, George, 172  
 Bennet(t), Miss, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25-6, 27, 29,  
 30, 35, 41  
 Bennett, Ann Grace, 9, 20, 26, 33, 35, 41, 107,  
 108, 207  
 — Charlotte, 9  
 — Clarissa Ann (see *Conquest, Mrs. Ben-  
 jamin, I*)  
 — Elizabeth (Mrs. Walter Blackmore), 9,  
 20  
 — Fanny (Mrs. Martin Blackmore), 9, 20  
 — Harriet, 9  
 — Joshua, 8, 9, 20  
 — Mrs. Joshua (? Sarah), 8  
 — Sarah (Young), 9, 20, 33, 41  
 — Solomon, 9  
 — Thomas, 9  
 — Mrs. (no relation), 171, 209  
 Bennett and Martell (Music Hall act), 186  
 Bensontag, Mr. (Conjuror), 62  
 Beverley, Clara, 21, 27, 33, 35, 37  
 — Henry Roxby, 20-21, 26, 33, 37  
 — Mrs. Henry (Louisa White), 20-21, 22,  
 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 33, 37  
 — William Roxby (Sr.), 21  
 — William Roxby (Jr.), 33  
 Blackwood, Virginia, 144  
 Blanchard, E. L., 63, 68, 72, 80, 84, 85, 89,  
 92, 93, 104, 126, 170  
 — Tom, 138  
 Bland, Mrs., 136

# INDEX

Bologna (Harlequin), 14, 138  
 — (Jr.), 138  
 Bon Gaultier, 52  
 Booth, "General," 123-30  
 Boucicault, Dion, 215  
 Branscomb, Mr. (Surrey), 140  
 Brock, Miss (Dancer), 11, 12, 20  
 Brooke, Gustavus V., 54, 55, 143, 192, 200  
 — Mrs. G. V. (see *Jones, Avonia*)  
 Broom, Mr. (Manager), 129  
 Broomhead, Henry, 105, 210  
 — Mrs. Henry (see *Conquest, Isabella*)  
 — Henry Oliver, 211  
 — Isabella Laura (see *Behring, Issy*)  
 Brough, William, 194, 212  
 Brown, Ivor, 223, 230  
 Brownhill, F. R. (see *Robson*)  
 Brummell, Beau, 4  
 Buislay, H. & E., 76  
 Bullock, Mr. (Surrey), 137  
 Bulmer, Miss May (Mrs. Sturgeon), 54  
 Bundy, Ferguson, 184  
 Bunn, Alfred, 50, 142  
 Bunyan, John, 33  
 Burroughs, Watkyns (Surrey), 141  
 Burton, Mr. (House Manager), 16  
 Byrne, Mr. (Harlequin), 139

Cabanel, Mr. (Architect), 8, 138  
 Calvert, Louis, 223, 224  
 Campbell, Herbert, 123, 169  
 Candelon, Mr. (Musician), 104  
 — Kate (see *Vaughan*)  
 Canterbury, Archbishop of, 124  
 "Carados" (see *Newton, H. Chance*)  
 Carlos, Mr. (Actor), 33  
 Carpenter, J. E., 63  
 Carroll, Sydney, 223  
 Carter, Mr. (Actor), 25  
 Catherine of Russia, Empress, 137  
 Caulfield, Mr. and Mrs. (Singers), 63  
 Celeste, Madame, 143  
 Chaplin, Charles, 232  
 Chapman, E. R., 62  
 Charles II, King, 3, 7  
 Charlotte, Princess, 10  
 Cherry, Mr. (Dramatist), 140  
 Church, Charles J., 187  
 Church and Stage Guild, 125  
 Clara, Madame, 26  
 Claremont, Lizzie, 151  
 Clark, T. G., 117-8, 123, 125-8  
 Clarke, John K. 146  
 Clynds, John H., 112, 113, 125, 126, 127-8  
 Cobham, Mr. (Actor), 38  
 Cohen, Isaac, 220  
 Coleman, John, 77-8, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 195, 197-8, 199, 202, 204  
 Collier, C. W., 75  
 — Mrs. C. W. (Madame Luiza), 75  
 Collins, Arthur, 181, 182  
 — Mr. (Manager), 50  
 Comer, George, 152  
 Coney, Jack, 109  
 Congreve, William, 6  
 Conquest, Ada (Jouanno), 86, 121, 186  
 — Amille (Farrell), 5, 46, 50, 73, 82, 83, 101, 105, 108, 198, 212-3, 226

Conquest, Amy (Rogers), 186  
 — Arthur, 84, 119, 122, 156, 160-164, 168, 171, 172, 174, 179-85, 186  
 — Mrs. Arthur (Lottie Hallett), 79, 162, 166, 171  
 — Benjamin Oliver. References: 3, 8, 12, 14, 15, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 49, 59, 67, 70, 74, 94, 100, 101, 102, 104, 105, 106, 115, 124, 125, 130, 135, 166, 192, 195, 198, 199, 210, 211, 212, 234. Ancestry, 3; birth, 3-4; childhood, 4-6, 12-13; first performance, 17-18; at Pavilion, 22, 27-8; at Brunswick, 23-5; marriage, 29; at Olympic, 28-9, 54-5; at Coburg, 29-30, 36; at Garrick, 31-7, 40-6; at Astley's, 39-40; at Sadler's Wells, 48; burnt out at Garrick, 52-3; at Hampshire Hog, 54-5; as actor, 44, 48, 54-5, 73; at Grecian, 71-9, 97-106; second marriage, 107; death, 107; funeral, 108; will, 15, 108, 169  
 — Mrs. Benjamin (I) (Clarissa Ann Bennett), 8-9, 11-12, 14, 15, 20-1, 22, 25-6, 27, 29-30, 31, 33, 35, 39, 40, 41, 45, 48, 49, 51, 52, 56, 71, 72, 74, 76, 79, 80, 81, 103-4, 106, 107, 108, 115, 187, 213  
 — (Dancing School), 29, 71, 75, 81, 85, 88, 103-4  
 — (II), (Jane Elizabeth Allen), 107-8  
 — Cissie (Giles), 185  
 — Clara (Dillon), 14, 25, 26, 35, 45, 48-50, 55, 103, 113, 169, 187, 188, 189, 191, 194-6, 197-9, 206, 207, 209  
 — Daisy, 119, 165  
 — Elizabeth (Lizzie: Beard), 86, 91, 98, 115-6, 165, 166  
 — Elizabeth (Betty: Joseph), 182, 184-5, 186  
 — Fred (b. 1870), 94, 119, 156, 160, 161, 163, 166, 168, 171, 172, 174, 175, 179, 183, 186, 211, 220  
 — Mrs. Fred (Kate Olga Vernon), 171, 174, 211, 220  
 — Fred (b. ca. 1888), 175, 185  
 — George Augustus Oliver (George Conquest, Sr.). References: 3, 14, 39, 50, 51, 74, 76, 98, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 113, 115, 116, 117, 124, 125, 126, 127, 129, 130, 135, 144, 148, 152, 156, 157, 162, 163, 165, 171, 173, 176, 179, 183, 185, 186, 199, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 216, 218, 219, 220, 221, 232. Birth, 45; as child actor, 46, 78; in Garrick fire, 52; schooling, 55-6, 80; first play, 77; pantomime début, 78-81; as pantomimist, 80-96, 158-60, 164; as artist, 79; as acrobat, 83, 84, 90, 91, 110; as dramatist, 102, 113, 146, 152, 154-5, 167; as actor, 114, 145-6, 150-1, 160, 167, 216; marriage, 97-8; inherits Grecian, 108; leaves Grecian, 117; visits to America, 118, 119-22, 163; accidents, 119-22, 146-7, 160; buys Surrey, 135; Surrey routine, 147; houses, 166; change of name, 166; on Managers Council, 167; on Select Committee, 167; death, 164, 168-9; funeral, 169; will, 169; character, 113, 170, 173, 236; aims and achievements, 235-7.

# INDEX

Conquest, Mrs. George (Elizabeth Osmond), 79, 88, 97, 98, 103, 104, 165, 166  
 — George Benjamin (George Conquest, Jr.), 84, 85-6, 89, 95, 98, 108, 119-21, 156, 157, 158, 161, 162, 163, 164, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 185, 214, 218, 236  
 — Isabella (Broomhead), 51, 74, 75, 83, 105, 108, 208, 210-11  
 — Laura (Dyson), 50, 74, 75, 83, 103, 105, 106, 108, 208, 209, 211  
 — Laura (Swanstone), 86  
 — Louisa (Gill), 165  
 — Lydia (Martell), 186  
 — Sir Richard (17th cent.), 26  
 Conway, Annie, 171  
 Cooke, T. P., 51, 142  
 Cooper, Gladys, 232  
 Coquelin, Benoit, 56  
 Cornell, Katherine, 227  
 Costello, Tom, 164  
 Costume Plays, Lister's Views on, 228-9  
 Courte, Mr. (Actor), 191  
 Courtenay, Miss (Singer), 17-8, 22  
 Coveney, Harriet, 68, 76, 82  
 Cowan, Maurice, 183  
 Coward, Noël, 225  
 Cowell, Sam, 28  
 Coxwell, Mr. (Aeronaut), 76  
 Cramer, Mrs. H., 45  
 Craven, Tom, 152  
 Creswick, W., 142, 143  
 Crimean War, 76  
 Cross, John, 138, 139  
 Crossman, Mr. (Equestrian), 138  
 "Crowquill" (Artist), 87  
 Cruikshanks, Charles, 151, 157, 160, 165, 166, 171  
 Cummings, Constance, 232  
 Cushman, Charlotte, 192  
 Cushnie, Thérèse, 44-5, 103-4  
 Dando, Walter, 121  
 — Mrs. Walter (Mlle. Aenea), 121  
 Danvers, Johnny, 164  
 Davidge, G. B., 38, 142, 187  
 — Mrs. G. B., 142  
 Davidson, Mr. (Manager), 54, 55  
 Davis, J., 43  
 — Mr. (Surrey), 137  
 Day, W. C., 55, 187  
 De Camp, Miss (Mrs. Kemble), 136  
 Dell, Miss, 27  
 D'Ennery, M., 167, 193  
 Dennett, Misses, (Dancers), 12  
 Denvil, H. G., 44, 47  
 Deulin, Nicola (Isaac Dowling), 63, 103  
 Dibdin, Charles, 8, 39, 135-7, 140  
 — Tom, 139, 140  
 Dickens, Charles, 16, 17, 63-5, 112, 197-8  
 Didot, M., 74  
 Dillon, Arthur, 25, 27, 142, 187  
 — Mrs. Arthur (Eliza), 25, 27, 187  
 — Charles, 25, 50, 51, 55, 77-9, 101, 102, 187-207, 222  
 — Mrs. Charles (I) (see *Conquest, Clara*)  
 — Mrs. Charles (II) (see *Mortimer, Bella*)  
 — Clara (George), 51, 103, 189, 199, 202, 204, 207

Dillon, Henry C., 207  
 — T., 187  
 Disher, M. Willson, 138  
 Donald, James, 232  
 Donat, Robert, 230  
 Douglass, John (b. 1814), 50-1, 154, 187  
 — John, (b. 1847), 154, 209  
 — Richard, 145  
 Dowling, Isaac (see *Deulin*)  
 Dowton, William, 38, 39  
 Ducrow, Andrew, 39, 53, 80  
 Dukes, Ashley, 230  
 Dunn, Mr. (Manager), 140  
 Dunning, Alice (see *Lingard*)  
 Duvernay (Dancing School), 104, 196  
 Dyall, Franklin, 227  
 Dyson, Amy, 160, 162, 171, 208, 210  
 — Henry, 106, 208  
 — Laura (Leonard), 160, 162, 171, 208-10, 211  
 Eagle Tavern (see also *Grecian Saloon* and *Grecian Theatre*). References: 41, 56, 65, 79, 85, 126, 129. Built (1821), 59; wrestling matches, 60; aeronautics, 60, 76; gardens in 1832, 61-2; Dickens at, 63-4; rebuilt (1839), 67-8; gardens in 1841, 69; dancing-platform, 62, 74, 124, 129-30; attacks upon, 98-9; "Waiter at the Eagle," 99-101; Sala at, 105; gardens in 1899, 129-30; details of lease, 124; as hostel, 126; rebuilt (1900), 130  
 Edward VII, King, 181  
 — VIII (as Prince), 181  
 Edwardes, George, 183  
 Elizabeth I, Queen, 7, 71  
 Ellenborough, Lord, 35  
 Elliott, Denholm, 232  
 — William, 16-7  
 — Mrs. William (Catherine), 16-7  
 Ellis, John, 143  
 Elliston, Charles, 142  
 — R. W., 36, 37, 135, 139-40, 141, 142  
 Elsler, Mr. (Wire-walker), 51  
 — Josephine, 76  
 Elton, Mr. (Actor), 36, 37, 188  
 Ervine, St. John, 224  
 Etheria, Mlle. (see *Conquest, Ada*)  
 Eugénie, Empress, 76  
 Evans, Edith, 230  
 — Mr. (Pantaloone), 142  
 — Will, 182  
 Exmouth, Lord, 10  
 Faranelli, Signor, 76  
 Farebrother, Mrs. 196  
 Farrell, Amy, 160, 171, 172, 213, 226  
 — Clara (Cissy: Lister), 102, 113, 152, 160, 171, 209, 213-8, 220-1, 223, 226  
 — G. H. (no relation) (see *Macdermott*)  
 — Henry, 105, 213, 226  
 — Mrs. Henry (see *Conquest, Amilie*)  
 — John (no relation), 20, 21, 22, 27, 32, 34, 35-6, 37, 38, 40, 46, 105  
 — Laura (Rimington), 213  
 — Michael, 105

# INDEX

- Farren, Mr. (Stage Manager), 24-5  
 — William, 66  
 Faucit, Helen, 192, 198  
 Fearon, Mr. (Musician), 24  
 — Miss, 24, 25  
 Ffrangcon Davies, Gwen, 228  
 Fitchett, Julia, 111  
 Fitzball, Edward, 141, 142, 195-6, 198  
 Fitzwilliam, Mrs. Fanny, 46, 141, 195-6  
 Flexmore, Mr. (Clown), 63, 77, 103  
 Foote, Miss, 196  
 — Samuel, 7  
 Formby, George, 174  
 Forster, John, 197  
 Foster, C. M., 143  
 Fournier, Marc, 193  
 Freer, Charles, 31, 33, 37, 44, 45, 47, 101, 199, 202  
  
 Gann, Mr. (Actor), 33  
 Garrick, David, 31, 33, 36  
 Garrick Tavern, 31, 43, 45, 48-50, 53  
 Garrick Theatre. References: 15, 20, 21, 22, 74, 78, 101, 103, 104, 131, 145, 187, 235, 237.  
 Description, 32-3; first performance, 33-4; dispute with Pavilion, 34-7; auctioned, 38; Downton's Shakespeare season, 38-9; reopened by Gomersal and Conquest, 40-2; pantomimes, 37, 45; leased to Parry, 46; leased to Freer, 47; riots at, 47; Dillon's benefit, 50, 187; destroyed by fire, 52-3; subsequent history, 53-4.  
 Geary, Inspector, 127  
 George III, King, 6  
 — IV (as Regent), 6  
 — V, King, 183  
 George, Henry (Ratcliffe), 206  
 — Mrs. Henry (see *Dillon, Clara*)  
 Gideon, John, 44, 167  
 Gielgud, John, 228, 229, 231  
 Giffard, Henry, 31  
 Gilbert, Mr. (Actor), 25  
 — W. S., 153  
 Giles, Ernest, 185  
 Glindon, Robert, 65-6  
 Glossop, Mr. (Theatre proprietor), 11  
 — Mrs. (Musician), 24  
 Goldsmith, Mr. (Actor), 24  
 Gomersal, Edward, 20, 21, 28, 29, 40, 41, 43, 44, 46, 51-2, 53, 222  
 — Mrs. Edward, 44  
 Gordon, Harriet, 73  
 Graddon, Miss, 36, 142  
 Graham, Mr. (Actor), 73  
 Grammani (Pantaloone), 75  
 Grant, Mr. (Surrey), 137  
 Grattan, Mr. (Manager), 50  
 Graves, George, 182  
 Grecian Café, 130  
 Grecian Music Hall, 110-11 (see also *Royal Eagle under Theatres: London*)  
 Grecian Saloon, 56. Built (1831), 61; licence refused, 41, 62; entertainments, 62-3; description (1834), 63; Dickens at, 63-4; Chinese Pavilion, 68; Olympic Temple, 67-8, 116; vaudeville, 65; performers, 65-8; opera, 68; audiences, 69-70; taken by Conquest, 70.  
 Grecian Theatre, 3, 6, 15, 45, 130, 147, 152, 153, 154, 156, 169, 172, 199, 207, 208, 210, 212, 221, 235, 237. Licensed, 71; first performance (1851), 72-3; early pantomimes, 74-5, 79; redecorated (1854), 76; George Conquest in pantomime, 80-96; rebuilt (1858), 101; melodramas, 102, 108-14; new theatre (1877), 116; sold to T. G. Clark, 117; sold to Salvation Army, 123-31; demolished, 130.  
 Green, Mr. (Stage Manager), 142  
 — Mr. (Aeronaut), 60  
 Greet, Ben, 175  
 Grein, W. T., 223  
 Grey, Mr. (Manager), 38  
 Grimaldi, Giuseppe (*b.* 1713), 135  
 — Joseph (*b.* 1778), 11, 14, 16, 81, 95  
 — Joseph (*b.* 1802), 15, 16-7  
 — Marianne (see *Lupino*)  
 Guildhall School of Music, 209  
 Guillaume & Tanqueray (Solicitors), 79  
 Guitry, Sacha, 232  
 Guiver, James, 118  
  
 Haines, Mr. (Actor), 44  
 Hallett, Charlotte (Lottie) (see *Conquest, Mrs. Arthur*)  
 Hampshire Hog (Tavern), 54-5  
 Hanley, Peter, 48, 70  
 Hannon, P. J., 176  
 Harborne, Mr. (Surrey), 137  
 Hardwick, Mr. (Magistrate), 34  
 Harland, Julia, 73  
 Harris, Mr. (Aeronaut), 60  
 Harris, Sir Augustus, 111, 147, 160  
 Haye, Helen, 227  
 Henderson, Marie, 117  
 "Henry," Mr. and Mrs., 32-3, 37  
 Herbert, Mrs. (Actress), 138  
 Heywood, Mr. (Surrey), 140  
 Hibbert, H. G., 68, 103, 167  
 Hobbs, Jack, 176  
 Hobson, Harold, 233  
 Holland, William, 117, 135, 144, 170  
 Hollingshead, John, 63, 68  
 Honner Mr. (Manager), 48, 53  
 Hood, Thomas, 63  
 Hopkins, Miriam, 227  
 Howe, J. B., 54, 107  
 Howells, Mr. and Mrs. (Singers), 62  
 Hughes, Charles, 135-7  
 Hugo, Victor, 77, 157  
 Hulin, M. (Acrobat), 51  
 Hull, Mr. (Singer), 43  
 Hunt, Mr. (Actor), 36, 38  
 — Chief Inspector, 127  
 — Henry (M.P.), 60  
 Huntley, Mr., 142  
  
 "Ikey-Spikey," 49  
 Indian Mutiny, 81  
 Inverarity, Miss (Dancer), 39  
 Irving, Sir Henry, 167, 169, 183, 204, 237  
 Isaacson, Barney, 63  
 Jacobs, John, 109  
 James I, King, 14, 231

# INDEX

- James, W. W., 117  
 Jeans, Isabel, 230  
 Johnson, Mr. (Manager), 53  
 — Mr. (Solicitor), 79  
 Jones, Avonia (Mrs. G. V. Brooke), 143  
 — James, 137, 138, 139, 140  
 Jordan, "Giant" (Wrestler), 60  
 Joseph, Susan, 186  
 Jouanno, Adèle, 186  
 Junot, Marshal, 3
- Kean, Charles, 191, 192  
 — Mrs. Charles (Ellen Tree), 192  
 — Edmund, 6, 22, 36, 54, 187, 216  
 Kemble, Charles, 136  
 — Mrs. Charles (Miss De Camp), 136  
 — J., 36  
 Kemp, Mr., 6  
 King's Bench Prison, 137  
 Klepper, Herr (Contortionist), 161  
 Knowles, Sheridan, 197  
 Koch, Paul de, 167
- Lade, Sir John, 137  
 Landeck, Benjamin, 152  
 Landis, Jessie Royce, 233  
 Lane, Samuel, 53, 66, 101  
 Langley, Miss (Actress), 44  
 — Mr. (Surgeon), 17  
 Lanner, Katti, 104  
 Lascelles, Mr. (Dancing-Master), 137  
 Latham, Mr. (Actor), 36  
 Lavall, James, 231  
 Lawler, Mr. (Dramatist), 139  
 Lawrence, Mr. (Actor), 44  
 — T. E., 227  
 Le Clercq, Pierre, 10, 11, 12, 20, 21, 104  
 — Mrs. Pierre, 10  
 — Family, 63, 103-4  
 Lec, Nelson, 53  
 Le Fanu, Sheridan, 209  
 Leicester, Ernest, 171, 173  
 Lemaître, Frédéric, 193  
 Leno, Dan, 123, 147, 159, 160, 164, 169, 171,  
 181, 182, 232  
 — Mrs. Dan (Lydia Reynolds), 147, 159  
 Leonard, Herbert, 152, 162, 171, 210, 215  
 Levy, Lawrence, 53, 54  
 Lewis, "Monk," 187  
 Lincoln, Abraham, 3  
 Lindo, Olga, 225  
 Lingard, Alice (Dunning), 103-4  
 Lister, Francis H. (Frank) (b. 1868), 161,  
 162, 165, 171, 174, 214-23, 225  
 — Francis (b. 1899), 221, 222-34  
 — Francis S. (b. 1927), 226  
 Liston, Mr. (Comedian), 106  
 Lloyd, Marie, 174  
 London County Council, 167, 174  
 Lorne, Marion, 227  
 Louis Philippe, King, 55  
 Loy, Miss (Dancer), 20  
 Luiza, Mlle. (Mrs. C. W. Collier), 75  
 Lunt, Alfred, 228  
 Lupino, Barry, 14  
 — George, 82  
 — Marianne, 14-17  
 — Stanley, 14
- Lupino, Thomas Frederick, 14  
 — Family, 14, 84  
 "Lyddal" (David Garrick), 31  
 Lytton, E. Bulwer, 189, 191
- M'Henry, Miss (Dancer), 30  
 McArdle, J. F., 144  
 Macdermott, G. H. (Farrell), 85, 110, 111  
 112, 157, 170  
 Macdonald, Miss (Actress), 128  
 Macfarren, Mr. (Manager), 38  
 Macnaghten, Frank, 174  
 Macnamara, Mrs. J. H., 33  
 Macready, W. C., 187, 192  
 Maetzger, Paul (see *Meritt*)  
 Malcolm, J. D., 54  
 Mandlebert, Lizzie, 113, 167  
 Mangeon, Mrs. (Actress), 33  
 Manly, Mr. (Actor), 120-21  
 Mansell, Richard, 221  
 Marguerite and May (Variety turn), 172  
 Marsden, Betty, 232  
 Marston, Westland, 67, 196-8, 201, 202,  
 204-5  
 Martell, Charles, 186  
 Martin, T., 43  
 Mary, Queen, 183  
 Masaryk, Jan, 233  
 Mason, Mr. (Actor), 37  
 Matthison, Mr. (Dramatist), 148  
 Maurice, Mr. (Theatre Proprietor), 24-5  
 — Mrs., 27  
 Mead, Tom, 111, 113  
 Mehan, D. A., 232  
 Mentrup, Bella (see *Mortimer*)  
 Meritt, Paul, (Maetzger), 108-9, 112, 114,  
 135, 145, 146, 152, 153, 154, 170  
 Milano, John, 103-4  
 — Mrs. John (see *Cushnie, Thérèse*)  
 Millais, Ida, 209  
 Millay, Edna, 116  
 Miller, Miss E., 113  
 — St. Aubyn, 152  
 Miln, Mrs. Hamilton, 175  
 Milne, A. A., 226  
 Moncrieff, J. W., 41, 63  
 Monkhouse, Harry, 148  
 Montague, Miss E., 187  
 Montgomery, C., 75, 98  
 Morell, André, 230  
 Mortimer, Bella (Mentrup: Mrs. Charles  
 Dillon, II), 204, 207  
 Moss, Theodore, 121  
 Motley (Costumiers), 228  
 Mountain, Mrs. (Miss Wilkinson), 136
- Nana Sahib, 81  
 Napoleon III, 76  
 Nash, "Jolly" John, 111  
 Nelson, Lord, 10, 69  
 — Maud, 171, 172  
 Newton, H. Chance ("Carados"), 113, 151,  
 154  
 Nichols, C. B., 172  
 — Harry, 169  
 — Miss M. (Dancer), 11, 12  
 Norman, Mr. (Clown), 11

# INDEX

- Norris, Ernest, 220  
 Novosielski, Mr. (Surrey), 137
- Odell, Mr. (Theatre Proprietor), 31  
 Ogden, Nat and Alice, 111  
 Oliver, Sir Benjamin (17th cent.), 3  
 — Benjamin (b. 1804) (see *Conquest, Benjamin Oliver*)  
 — Benjamin (b. 1831), 14, 36  
 — Charles, 3, 15  
 — George Augustus, 3, 4, 5  
 — Mrs. G. A. (Sarah), 3, 5, 12, 15, 26-7  
 — Henry, 4, 5, 12  
 — Joseph, 3  
 — Mary, 3, 27  
 — Penelope, 3, 4, 27  
 — Samuel, 3, 15  
 — Sarah, 3  
 — William, 3  
 Olivier, Sir Laurence, 231  
 Orange Coffee House (see *Theatres: Royal Orange*)  
 Orme, W., 61  
 Orton, Arthur, 111  
 Osbaldiston, F., 38, 142  
 Osmond, Elizabeth (see *Conquest, Mrs. George*)  
 — William, (see *Ozmond*)  
 Ovid, 81  
 Oxberry, Mr. (Writer), 18, 140, 141  
 Oxenford, John, 78, 192, 193-4  
 Ozmond, William, 88, 104, 156
- Paganini, Niccolo, 62  
 Palmer, John, 137  
 Parker, John, 102  
 Parry, Mr. (Manager), 46  
 Pell, Charles, 222  
 Pettitt, Henry, 108-9, 111, 116, 123, 154, 170  
 Phelps, Dr. C., 119  
 — Samuel, 191  
 Phillips, Mr. (Singer), 142  
 — Philip, 61  
 — Miss S., 36, 38  
 Pitt, Mrs. C., 143  
 Pleasure Gardens, etc.  
 — Alexandra Palace, 92-3, 156  
 — Apollo, 140  
 — Bagnigge Wells, 117  
 — British Horse Academy, 135  
 — Cremorne, 117  
 — Crystal Palace, 73, 89, 90  
 — Dog and Duck, 140  
 — North Woolwich, 144  
 — Peerless Pool, 6, 59  
 — Ranelagh, 117  
 — Shepherd and Shepherdess, 6, 59  
 — Vauxhall, 117  
 — White Conduit House, 41, 117  
 Plumer, Mrs. Cramer, 38  
 Pope, Mrs. (Actress), 44
- Quartermaine, Leon, 229
- R.S.P.C.A., 184  
 Randall, Harry, 181  
 Ranier, Edward, 207  
 Ratcliffe, H. G. (see *George, Henry*)
- Raymond, Mr. (Manager), 38, 67  
 Rayner, Mr. (Manager), 39  
 Reade, Mr. (Surrey), 137  
 — Charles, 102  
 Reeve, Ada, 232  
 Reeves, Sims, 65, 66  
 Regnier, M., 198  
 Reynolds, Lydia (see *Leno, Mrs. Dan*)  
 Rich, Mr. (Actor), 81  
 Richards, James, 54  
 Ridgway, T., 75  
 Ristori, Madame, 67  
 Ritchie, J. E., 98-9  
 Rivers, Edie, 172  
 Robinson, G. T., 116  
 Robson, Fred, 48, 65, 66-7, 126  
 Romanzini, Miss (Mrs. Bland), 136  
 Rothschild, A. de, 183  
 Rouse, Thomas, 56, 59-70, 72, 73, 74, 75, 94, 104, 124, 126  
 — (Executors of), 123  
 Rowella (Clown), 142  
 Roxby, William (see *Beverley*)  
 Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, 222  
 Royal Circus (see *Surrey Theatre*)  
 Royal Eye Hospital, 176  
 Royal George (Balloon), 60
- Sala, George A., 28, 66, 88, 105, 146, 149, 150  
 Saloon Theatres, 61  
 Salvation Army, 123-31, 172, 176  
 Saxe-Cobourg, Prince and Princess Leopold of, 10  
 Scenic Club, 55  
 Scott, Clement, 104-5  
 — Sir Walter, 23, 62  
 Scudamore, F. A., 152  
 Sears, Dr. W. G., 233-4  
 Selby, Charles, 63  
 Selig, Ernest (Giles), 185  
 Sennett, George, 112, 123, 127-8  
 — Mrs. G., 128  
 Serle, Mr. (Manager), 38  
 Shakespeare, William (see also *Index to Play Titles*), 33, 36, 37, 73, 139, 158, 175, 196, 203  
 Shelley, A. G., 144  
 Shepherd, R., 142, 143  
 Sheridan, R. B., 6  
 Sherson, Erroll, 103-4, 114  
 Shirley, Arthur, 152  
 Shoreditch Vestry, 127  
 Siddons, Mrs., 6, 36, 67, 77, 198  
 Sinclair, Mr. (Actor), 36  
 Sloman, Charles, 20, 21, 29, 43-4, 75  
 Smith, E. T. (Manager), 144  
 — George (Equestrian), 138  
 — J. and G. (Singers), 139  
 — "Major," 127  
 — Miss (Singer), 62  
 Snow, Sara, 26  
 Solomons, Mr., 38  
 Somersset, C. A., 74  
 Spicer, Henry, 54, 55  
 Spry, Henry, 82, 87, 95, 116, 123, 158, 170, 172  
 Stanfield, Clarkson, 61  
 Stephens, Walter, 174  
 Stevens, Mr. (Phrenologist), 137

# INDEX

- Stevenson, R. L., 236  
 Stillsbury, Miss (Mrs. Atkinson), 47  
 Stirling, Thomas, 16  
 Stocks, Jane, 60  
 Stoll, Sir Oswald, 184  
 Stroganoff, Count, 108  
 Sturgeon, Mrs. (Miss Bulmer), 54  
 Surrey Theatre. References: 6, 8, 15, 36, 37, 38, 81, 87, 100, 113, 117, 131, 169, 187, 207, 211, 235, 237. Early history, 135-44; first performance, 136; dump dramas, 138; burned and rebuilt (1805), 139; under Elliston, 139-41; dog dramas, 140; burned (1865), 142; changes in management, 142-3; new building, 143; under Holland, 135, 144; taken by Conquest, 135; melodramas, 145-55, 213-20; pantomimes, 142-3, 156-64; organisation, 147, 235-6; Conquests' farewell, 172-3; subsequent history, 174-6  
 Suter, W. E., 99  
 Swinburne, Nora, 225  
 Sylvain, Vernon, 231  
 Syms, Algernon, 128, 151  
 Thackeray, W. M., 43, 51  
 Theatres: Licensing Rules (L.C.C.), 73, 167-8, 174, 236; "Major" and "Minor" dispute, 7, 8, 22, 31, 32, 34-5, 36-8, 40-2, 50-1, 62, 136, 139-40  
 Theatres: London: *For (Old) Garrick, Grecian and Surrey see individual headings.*  
 Adelphi, 8, 12, 30, 54, 63, 99, 117, 165, 215, 225  
 Albert and Garrick, 54  
 Aldwych, 223  
 Apollo, 222, 223  
 Astley's, 8, 39-40, 51-2, 53, 135, 139  
 Avenue, 222  
 Bedford, 155  
 Britannia, 53, 54, 66, 101, 111, 154  
 Brixton, 221  
 Brunswick, 23-5, 27, 34  
 Camden, 221  
 City, 38, 41  
 City of London (Norton Folgate), 44, 46, 51, 53, 187  
 Cobourg (see also *Old Vic.*), 8, 10-12, 15, 18, 20-1, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29-30, 35, 36, 38  
 Court, 222  
 Covent Garden, 6, 7, 39, 81, 101, 139, 182  
 Criterion, 231  
 Drury Lane, 6, 7, 44, 101, 102, 111, 116, 123, 139, 140, 142, 147, 160, 179, 181, 182, 198, 202  
 Duke of York's, 222  
 East London (see *Royalty*)  
 Eastern Polytechnic (Garrick), 54  
 Eppingham, 53  
 Elephant and Castle, 174, 221  
 English Opera House (see also *Lyceum*), 18-9  
 Finsbury Park Empire, 223  
 Gaiety, 148  
 Garrick (New), 223  
 Globe (Old), 146, 221, 222  
 Globe (New), 225  
 Goodman's Fields, 31  
 Haymarket, 7, 44, 63, 222, 226, 231  
 Holborn, 110  
 Italian Opera House (His Majesty's), 23  
 J. B. Howe's (Garrick), 54  
 Lincoln's Inn Fields, 81  
 Lyceum, 18, 54, 78-9, 101, 102, 152, 194-9, 204, 207, 212, 222  
 Lyric (Hammersmith), 230  
 Marylebone, 50-1, 154, 187-8, 189  
 New Albert (Garrick), 54  
 New Wells, 32  
 Old Vic (see also *Cobourg*), 8, 142, 237  
 Olympic, 8, 27, 28, 29, 38, 54, 55, 66, 68, 188  
 Palladium, 184  
 Pavilion (Whitechapel), 22, 26, 27-8, 34, 35-6, 37, 38, 46, 53, 68, 105, 154, 187, 220, 221, 234  
 Portman (see also *Marylebone*), 41  
 Prince of Wales's, 21  
 Princess's, 102, 202, 222  
 "Q", 231  
 Queen's (see also *Regency, West London*), 16, 38, 41  
 Regency, 20, 21, 26, 37, 130  
 Royal Amphitheatre (see *Astley's*)  
 Royal Circus (see *Surrey*, under individual heading)  
 Royal Eagle Music Hall, 129  
 Royal Orange, Pimlico, 38, 41  
 Royal Victoria (see *Old Vic.*)  
 Royalty (East London), 8, 15, 20, 21-2, 26  
 Sadler's Wells, 4, 8, 38, 44, 45, 48, 49, 53, 73, 78, 135, 145, 192, 202  
 Scala, 130, 222  
 St. James's, 232  
 St. Martin's, 225, 227  
 Standard, 53, 154, 209  
 Strand (Old), 38, 41  
 Terriss', Rotherhithe, 221  
 Torch, 231  
 Tottenham Street (see *Queen's, Regency, Prince of Wales's, West London*)  
 Vaudeville, 221, 225, 233  
 West London, 8  
 Whitehall, 227  
 Wyndham's, 223, 231  
 Theatres: Provincial and Foreign  
 Birmingham: Prince of Wales's, 213  
 Derby: Theatre Royal, 23  
 Dublin: Theatre Royal, 66  
 Hastings: Old Theatre, 29  
 Leeds: Empire, 183  
 Manchester: Colosseum, 190  
 Queen's, 77, 189, 190  
 Middlesbrough: Theatre Royal, 202-4  
 Naples: San Carlos, 23  
 Nottingham: Theatre Royal, 184  
 Paris: Théâtre Français, 198  
 Plymouth: Theatre Royal, 182  
 Sheffield: Adelphi, 77, 192  
 Theatre Royal, 77-8, 190-1  
 Tenterden: 29  
 York: Theatre Royal, 20  
 Theatres: U.S.A.  
 New Amsterdam, 180-1  
 Wallack's, 119-21

## INDEX

- Thorne, Mr. (Manager), 53  
 Thurtell, Mr. 141  
 Tichborne, Sir Roger, 111  
 Tinsley, Miss, 152  
 Titheradge, Madge, 225-6  
 Tobin, Mr., 187  
 Tomlins, F. G., 102  
 Toole, J. L., 169  
 Towers, Mr. (Manager), 190  
 Train, Jack, 84  
 Tree, Ellen (see *Kean, Mrs. Charles*)  
 — Sir Herbert Beerbohm, 54  
 — Viola, 223-4  
 Tripp, Mr. (M.C. at Grecian), 129  
 Tunstall, Kitty, 63
- Usher, Richard, 11
- Valli, Signor, 37  
 Vanbrugh, Sir John, 6  
 Vaudeville, Origin of name, 65  
 Vaughan, Kate, 103-4, 112, 129  
 Vestris, Madame, 38, 54, 68, 76, 106, 192  
 Victor, Mary Anne, 104, 123  
 Victoria, Princess (afterwards Queen), 10,  
 30, 65, 76, 168, 169  
 Vining, Mr. (Stage Manager), 47, 102  
 Violante, Madame, 14
- Wade, Mr. (Manager), 53  
 Walker, Mrs. (Landlady), 16  
 — Whimsical, 182  
 Wallack, J., 139, 195  
 — Mrs., 191  
 Watson, Malcolm, 173  
 Waylett, Mrs., 63  
 Wear, Mr., 141
- Webb, John, 171  
 Wellington, Duke of, 11, 13, 69  
 West, Colonel (Surrey), 135-6  
 — Mrs. (Surrey), 136, 137, 140  
 — Mrs. (Actress), 44, 50  
 — Temple, 137  
 Weyburn, Edward (Stage Manager), 180  
 White, Louisa Coghlan (see *Beverley, Mrs.*)  
 Whitwell, Stedman, 23  
 Wilkinson, Miss (Mrs. Mountain), 136  
 William IV, King, 61  
 Williams, Arthur, 90, 109, 112, 116, 123  
 — Fred, 123  
 — Harcourt, 232  
 — Mr. (Manager, Surrey), 141  
 — William (Manager, Pavilion), 22, 38  
 Wills, W. G., 222  
 Wilson, A. E., 80, 93, 96, 158, 175, 176  
 — Miss (Singer), 62  
 — Mr. (Musician), 62  
 Wilton, Marie (see *Bancroft, Lady*)  
 Winston, Mr., 7  
 Woffington, Peg, 14  
 Wood, Wee Georgie, 183, 185, 186  
 Woolgar, Mrs. (Actress), 198  
 Wroth, Warwick, 130, 176  
 Wyatt, William, 22, 26  
 Wyman, Francis, 23, 24, 31, 33, 40  
 Wyndham, Sir Charles, 232
- Yarnold, Mrs. Emma, 46, 187  
 Yates, Mr. (Manager), 46  
 — Mr. (Harlequin), 31  
 — Mrs., 24  
 — Miss, 24-5  
 Young, Mr. (Manager), 38
- Zola, Little, 172

## *Index to Play Titles*

(Including Ballets, Operas, Songs and Films)

- Abou Hassan (Opera), 68  
 Admetus and Alceste (Ballet), 136  
 Advance Guard, The, 22  
 Against the Tide, 152  
 Aladdin, 159, 161, 172  
 Almorán and Hamet, 138  
 Aloma, 225  
 Alone in London, 215  
 Alzora and Nerine (Ballet), 10-11, 20  
 Ambassador, The (Opera), 68  
 Angel of Death, The, 113-4, 152, 199, 210, 221  
 Antigone, 141  
 Arcadia, 68  
 Arrah-na-Pogue, 123, 152, 215  
 Artist of Florence, The, 198  
 Atlantic (Film), 227  
 Aurora (Ballet), 208  
 Austerlitz, 44
- Bachelor Father, 227  
 Barber of Seville, The (Opera), 38, 68  
 Barnaby Rudge, 188  
 Bastille, The, 137
- Battle of Waterloo, The, 51, 53  
 Bear-Hunters of the Pyrenees, The, 30  
 Bears, not Beasts, 29  
 Beaux Stratagem, 139  
 Beggars Opera, The, 139  
 Behind the Curtain, 110  
 Bells of Haslemere, The, 214  
 Belphegor, 77, 78, 79, 191, 192-3, 198, 199,  
 202, 212  
 Bertram, 44  
 Biddy, the Basket-Woman (Song), 65  
 Biffy, 182  
 Billy Barlow (Song), 27-8  
 Black Ey'd Susan, 48, 51, 142  
 Black Flag, The, 152, 213, 215  
 Black Sentinel, The, 50  
 Blackbeard, 138  
 Blighted Being, A, 67  
 Blind Boy, The, 140  
 Blue Bird of Paradise, The, 82  
 Bog Fiend, The, 45  
 Bohemian Girl, The (Opera), 68  
 Bold Stroke for a Wife, A, 140

# INDEX

- Boots at the Swan, 66  
 Bo'sun Bill, 223  
 Bottle Imp, The, 208  
 Bound to Succeed, 116  
 Brasseur de Preston, Le (Opera), 68  
 Bride of Aldgate, The, 46, 47  
 British Captain and the Indian Chief, The, 21  
 Broad Arrow, The, 218  
 Broken Heart, The, 189  
 Broken Wing, The, 224  
 Bronze Horse, The, 45  
 Brother for Brother, 221  
 Brothers' Duel, The, 50  
 Brutus, or the Fall of Tarquin, 51
- Cagot, The, 198  
 Capital and Labour, 153  
 Castle Spectre, The, 187  
 Cataract of the Ganges, The, 7  
 Catherine Howard, 114  
 Cavalier, The, 198  
 Chaperon Rouge (Opera), 68  
 Charles XII, 38 (see also "*The Hero of France*")  
 Chevy Chase, 141  
 Children in the Wood, The, 140  
 Cinderella, 164, 172, 181, 211  
 City of Sin, A, 172  
 Clive of India (Film), 229  
 Cloth of Gold, The, 30  
 Cloud King, The, 138  
 Come, Live with Me, 233  
 Comus, 10  
 Conquest of the Eagle, 75-6  
 Corsican Brothers, The, 191  
 Country Fair, The (Song), 66  
 Court Jester, The, 44  
 Crown Diamonds, The (Opera), 68  
 Cruel City, The, 218
- Daddalums, 223  
 Dame Blanche, La (Opera), 68  
 Danites, The, 145  
 Dangers of London, The, 152  
 Dark Secret, A, 209  
 Daughter of Ishmael, A, 218, 219  
 Daughter of the Regiment, The (Opera), 68  
 Daughter's Honour, A, 152, 218  
 Dead Beat, 152  
 Dead Man's Gold, A, 213  
 Destiny, 44  
 Devil on Two Sticks, The, 84  
 Devil's Luck, 152  
 Dishonored Lady, 227  
 Dog of Montargis, The, 20, 44, 188, 189  
 Don César de Bazan, 123, 126, 167, 189, 198  
 Don Giovanni (Opera), 68  
 Don Juan, 16  
 Don Pasquale (Opera), 68  
 Don't Listen, Ladies, 232  
 Drink, 152, 159, 162  
 Driven from Home (Grecian), 111  
 Driven from Home (Surrey), 152, 217  
 Drover's Dog, The, 50  
 Duc d'Ionne, Le (Opera), 68  
 Duke's Motto, The, 128 (see also "*Motto . . .*")  
 Dumb Slave, The, 51
- East Lynne, 123, 143  
 Elixir of Love, The (Opera), 68  
 Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, 29  
 Enchanted Wives, The, 189  
 English Rose, The, 210, 215  
 English Summer, An, 230  
 English Woman, An, 220  
 Esmeralda, 77, 191  
 Evil Eye, The, 37  
 Exile of St. Helena, The, 29
- Fabian, 198  
 Fair One with the Golden Locks, The, 160, 209, 215  
 Fair One with the Locks of Gold, The, 83, 208  
 Fairy of the Feathered Tribe, The, 37  
 Fall of Moscow, The, 51  
 Fatal Card, The, 221  
 Fatal Prophecy, The (Macbeth), 18  
 Faust, 76, 175  
 Fazio, 18  
 Fiends of London, 172  
 Fight for Life, A, 207  
 Fighters Calling, 230  
 Fighting Fifth, The, 152  
 Fille, d'Avare, La, 67  
 Fire King, The, 138  
 Flag Lieutenant, The, 222  
 Flora and Zephyr (Ballet), 74, 208  
 Flowers of the Forest, The, 109  
 Flying Dutchman, The, 85, 175  
 Flying from Justice, 215, 221  
 For Ever, 148-51, 152, 174  
 Fortune's Frolics, 114  
 Forty Thieves, The, 81, 160, 164, 172  
 Fra Diavolo (Opera), 68  
 Freischütz, Der (Opera), 26, 68, 75, 86  
 French Revolution, The, 30  
 Friendship, Love and Liberty, 33
- Gazza Ladra, La (Opera), 68  
 Geneviève, 77  
 George Barnwell, 139  
 Gilderoy, 45  
 Girl of my Heart, The, 218, 221  
 Gold, 102  
 Gold Dust, 47  
 Good Losers, 227  
 Goody Two-Shoes, 163  
 Green Lanes of England, The, 152, 213  
 Grim Goblin, 91-2, 119-21  
 Guy Fawkes, 30  
 Guy Mannering, 24, 37
- Half-Mast High, 221  
 Hamlet, 50, 189, 196, 198, 200-1, 204, 231  
 Hanged Man, The, 113  
 Happy-go-Lucky, 123  
 Happy Return, The (Ballet), 23  
 Harbour Lights, The, 207  
 Hard Struggle, A, 196, 197, 198, 212  
 Harlequin and the Genie of the Enchanted Harp, 29  
 Harlequin and the Witch of Ludlam, 139  
 Harlequin Crib, King of Clubs, 79  
 Harlequin Guy Faux, 82, 212  
 Harlequin King Pippin, 142

# INDEX

- Harlequin Rik-Rak, 84  
 Harlequin Rokoko, The Rock Fiend, 95, 118  
 Harlequin Sorcerer, 81  
 Harlequin Sun and Moon, 77-8  
 Harlequin Valentine and Orson, 82, 212  
 Harlequin's Honeymoon, 20  
 Harold Hawk, 109  
 Harp of Altenburg, 46  
 Hawley's of the High Street, 224, 232  
 Heartbreak House, 230  
 Henry IV, 38, 51  
 Henry V (Film), 231  
 Her Partner in Sin, 172  
 Herne the Hunter, 85-6  
 Hero of France, Charles XII, The, 29  
 Heroine of Spain, The, 188  
 Hicory, Dicory, Dock, 45  
 Hidden Crime, The, 172  
 High Life Below Stairs, 140  
 Highwayman, The, 50  
 Hokee-Pokee, 94, 117  
 Honey Moon, The, 140, 187  
 Hoodman Blind, 152, 213  
 Hop o' my Thumb, 156  
 House that Jack Built, The, 105  
 Housewarming (Garrick), 33-4  
 Housewarming (Surrey), 140  
 How London Lives, 153  
 Human Nature, 218  
 Human Tiger, The, 207  
 Humpty-Dumpty, 179-80  
 Hypocrite, The, 76
- In the Moonlight, 216  
 In the Next Room, 225  
 In the Ranks, 153  
 Indifferent Shepherd, The, 232  
 Invisible Avenger, The, 139  
 Is Life worth Living?, 152  
 Isabella, 46  
 Irishman in London, The, 18  
 It's Never Too Late to Mend, 102, 152, 208, 212, 218  
 Ivory Door, The, 226  
 Ivory Tower, The, 233
- Jack and Jill, 158, 161, 162  
 Jack and the Beanstalk, 159  
 Jack Sheppard (see also "*Old London*"), 50, 99  
 Jane Eyre, 151  
 Jason and Medea (Ballet), 208  
 Jew of Canada, The, 29  
 Jew, the Gamester . . . (etc.), The, 7  
 Jim Crow (Song), 27  
 John Stafford, 45  
 Jonathan Bradford, 142  
 Julius Caesar, 38, 191, 231
- Killing No Murder, 22  
 King Chess, 143  
 King Frolic, 123  
 King Lear, 31, 37, 197, 201, 202  
 King of Clubs, The, 218  
 King Rags, 183, 185  
 Kiss and the Rose, The, 63  
 Kohal Cave, 48  
 Kultur at Hofke, 222
- Lac des Fées (Opera), 68  
 Lady of Lyons, The, 198  
 Lady of St. Tropez, The, 198  
 Lancashire Lass, The, 114  
 Last Days of Pompeii, The, 44  
 Last Stroke of Midnight, The, 118  
 Léonard, 167  
 Let Us Be Gay, 227  
 Life as It Is, 48  
 Life of a Soldier, 24  
 Life's Highways, 188  
 Life's Ransom, A, 198  
 Light Ahead, 215  
 Lights o' London, The, 152, 218  
 Like and Unlike, 213  
 Lion Chief of Cabul, The, 29  
 Lion's Heart, A, 218  
 Lion's Love, A, 117  
 Literary Dustman, The (Song), 65  
 Llewellyn, 140  
 Lochinvar, 41  
 London Fireman, The, 172  
 London Haunts, 140  
 Lonely Man of the Ocean, The, 194  
 Lord and Lady Algy, 223  
 Lost, a Sovereign, 55  
 Lost in London, 126, 221  
 Lost Umbrella, The, 182  
 Lottery Ticket, The, 48, 66  
 Louis XI, 77, 191, 198, 200  
 Louisa of Lombardy, 138
- Macbeth, 17-8, 21, 36, 38, 50, 76, 107, 139, 187, 197, 198, 200, 202, 203-4, 229-30 (see also "*The Fatal Prophecy*")  
 Magic Flute, The, 138  
 Maid of Judah, The (Song), 44  
 Maid of Zaragossa, The, 189  
 Maloney, Mayor of Garrett, 140  
 Man in a Thousand, A, 215  
 Man They could not Hang, The (Film), 175  
 Mandarin, 136  
 Manfred, 202  
 Mankind, 145-6, 166, 174, 214  
 Marchiali, 45  
 Marco Sciarra, 189  
 Maritana, 175  
 Mary of Deptford, 21  
 Mary Rose, 226-7  
 Masaniello, 68, 71, 208  
 Master and Man, 153, 218  
 Matter of Fact, A, 224  
 Memoirs of the Devil, 74  
 Merchant of Venice, The, 36, 55  
 Merchant's Daughter, The, 48  
 Mermaid's Well, The, 23  
 Mesmerist, The, 118  
 Middleman, The, 221  
 Middy Ashore, The, 46  
 Midnight, or the Bells of Notre Dame, 152  
 Midsummer Night's Dream, A, 72, 231  
 Miller's Maid, The, 35  
 Million of Money, A, 216  
 Mischief Making, 46  
 Miser's Will, The, 214  
 Miss Muffit, 87, 163  
 Moment of Terror, A, 113  
 Money, 191

# INDEX

- Monte Cristo, 195  
 More than Ever, 148  
 Morgue, La, 29  
 Mother Bunch, 156-7  
 Mother Goose, 182  
 Motto on the Duke's Crest, The, 179, 199,  
 220 (see also "*Duke's* . . . .)  
 Mountain Sylph, The (Opera), 68  
 Mrs. White, 46  
 Much Ado about Nothing, 55, 77, 189, 191,  
 198  
 Murder Hole, 44  
 Mutiny at the Nore, 30, 35  
 Mutiny on the Bounty (Film), 229  
 My Jack, 166, 214, 218  
 My Poll and my Partner Joe, 142  
 Mysteries of Paris, The, 189  
  
 Nancy, 172  
 Napoleon's Godson, 36  
 Ne Touchez pas à la Reine (Opera), 68  
 Nelson Touch, The, 227-8  
 New Babylon, The, 145, 213, 214  
 New Way to Pay Old Debts, A, 38  
 New Year's Gift, A (Ballet), 35  
 Night and Morning, 189  
 Nix, the Demon Dwarf, 86-8  
 No Song, No Supper, 89  
 Non-Resident, The, 233  
 Nouredin and the Tartar Robbers, 20  
 Nymph of Mount Helicon, The, 20  
  
 Obi, or 3-Finger'd Jack, 20  
 Octorinc, 221  
 Old London ("Jack Sheppard"), 152, 218  
 Oliver Twist, 48, 78  
 Olympic Revels, 76  
 On Active Service, 152, 210  
 Orange Girl, The, 117  
 Othello, 36, 38, 187, 189, 197, 198  
 Other Men's Wives, 226  
 Our Betters, 226  
 Our Native Home, 210, 217, 218  
 Outward Bound, or The Fatal Wreck, 44  
  
 Paillasse, 193  
 Pascal Bruno, 167  
 Perdita (Burlesque), 101, 194, 212  
 Perfect Fit, A, 224  
 Peter Bell, the Waggoner, 37, 46  
 Peter the Emperor and Paul the Sailor, 21  
 Peter Wilkins and the Flying Indians, 78, 81,  
 148  
 Phantom Lover, The, 33  
 Phantoms, 152, 217  
 Playing at Loo-Loo, 110  
 Poachers, The, 24  
 Postillon de Longjumeau, Le (Opera), 68  
 Pretty Alice of Portsmouth, 51  
 Pride of Blood, 41  
 Private Secretary, The, 223  
 Punch and Judy (Pantomime), 208  
 Puss in Boots, 89, 157-8, 161  
  
 Quality Street, 226  
 Queen Mab, 74  
 Queen was in the Parlour, The, 225-6  
 Queen's Colours, The, 118  
  
 Queen's Evidence, 218  
 Quiet in the Forest, 231  
  
 Rags and Bones, 152  
 Raid in the Transvaal, The, 219-20  
 Raising the Wind, 139  
 Rebels' Victim, The, 47  
 Regular Irish Row, A, 20  
 Rehearsal, The, 31  
 Rencontre, The, 29  
 Rendezvous, The, 18  
 Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel, The (Film),  
 229  
 Richard of Bordeaux, 228-9  
 Richard III, 36, 114, 187  
 Richard Turpin, the Highwayman, 30  
 Richelieu, 198  
 Rigoletto, 175  
 Ring of Iron, A, 215, 217, 218  
 Rivals, The, 37, 54  
 Robert le Grange, 189  
 Robert Macaire, 174  
 Robert the Devil, 30  
 Robinson Crusoe, 84, 159, 208, 210  
 Rochester, 29  
 Roley-Poley, 93-4  
 Romeo and Juliet, 77, 187, 191  
 Royal Divorce, A, 222  
 Rye-House Plot, The, 48  
  
 School for Scandal, The, 76  
 Schriftens, the One-Eyed Pilot, 114  
 Secret, The (Farce), 45  
 Sentenced to Death, 113, 118  
 Serving the Queen, 152  
 Seven Sins, 153  
 Sexes and Sevens, 226  
 Shadows of a Great City, 221  
 Shall We Forgive Her?, 217  
 Shaughrann, The, 221  
 Shepherd King, The, 40  
 Siamorindianaboo, 29  
 Sicilian, The, 141  
 Sid, 108  
 Silent Foe, The, 207  
 Silver King, The, 152, 218  
 Silvester Daggerwood, 140  
 Sin(d)bad, 147, 159-60, 161-2, 181, 210, 219  
 Singing Trees and the Golden Waters, The,  
 45  
 Sirène, La (Opera), 68  
 Sleeping Beauty, The, 184, 214  
 Sleeping Clergyman, A, 231  
 Snip, Snap, Snorum, 90  
 Soldier's Bride, The (Ballet), 41  
 Soldier's Wedding, The, 222  
 Sole Survivor, The, 113  
 Son-in-Law, The, 140  
 Song of the Gout (Song), 54  
 Sonnambula, La (Opera), 68  
 Sons of Erin, 218  
 Spider and the Fly, The, 83, 208  
 Spitz-Spitze, the Spider Crab, 90-1  
 Spring-Heel'd Jack, 199  
 Stranger, The, 46, 77, 191, 198  
 Stranglers of Paris, The, 213  
 Such a Getting Up Stairs (Song), 48  
 Sylvana, 142

## INDEX

- Take a Chance, 227  
 Tale of the Thames, A, 152  
 Tam o' Shanter, 20  
 Taming of the Shrew, The, 175  
 Tarnish, 225  
 Tarzan of the Apes, 175  
 Tempest, The, 223, 228  
 Tempted to Sin, 172  
 Three Musketeers, The, 198  
 Ticket-of-Leave Man, The, 167, 221  
 Time, the Avenger, 218  
 To Call Her Mine, 152  
 Tommy Atkins, 153, 218, 219-20, 222  
 Toodles, The, 146  
 Trial by Battle, 10  
 True as Steel, 218  
 Twm John Catty, 35, 36  
  
 Union des Nations, L' (Ballet), 76  
  
 Venice Preserved, 7, 45  
 Village Forge, The, 152, 215  
 Villikins and his Dinah (Song), 66  
 Virginius, 37, 38, 197, 198  
 Vultures of London, The, 172  
  
 Waiter at Cremorne, The, 100  
 Waiter at the Eagle, The, 99-101  
  
 War of Wealth, The, 221  
 Wars of Cromwell, The, 52  
 Watchdog of the Walsinghams, The, 143  
 We all have our Little Faults, 173  
 Weeds and Flowers of Erin, The, 112  
 Werner, 37  
 What a Dog!, 174  
 When a Little Farm we Keep (Song), 29  
 Widow's Wedding, The, 195  
 William Tell, 77, 198  
 Winning Hand, The, 152  
 Winter's Tale, A, 195  
 Wisest Fool, The, 231  
 Woman's Love, 189  
 Woman's Secret, A, 77  
 Wood Demon, The, 89-90, 94  
 Work Girl, The, 152, 153, 218  
 World Against Her, The, 215  
 World's Verdict, The, 210, 219  
 Wraith of the Lake, The, 29  
  
 Yellow Dwarf, The, 92-3, 210, 220  
 Yellow Jacket, The, 222  
 You Never Can Tell, 223, 231-2  
 Young Widow, The, 73  
 Youth, 213, 218  
  
 Zacky, 174



